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"CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?"

THE SHELDON SIX ROSE

BY

GRACE M. REMICK

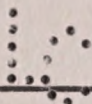
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"The Glenloch Girls" series, "The Sheldon Six—
Anne," etc.



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The Sheldon Six—Rose



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Introduction

THE first book of The Sheldon Six series belonged to Anne Sheldon, who was shy and unsociable, and thought that without school and reading there would be no joy in life. Having to give them up for a while, she became, to her own surprise, the steering-gear of an imaginary family car, and in the process found that if she walked straight up to her troubles they were likely to vanish.

Rose, Anne's next younger sister, was rather a contrary-minded, unimaginative young person, eager for out-of-door sports, and inclined to slip out of anything that seemed like work.

In this second book of the series, Rose, whom Anne has named the accelerator of the family car, begins to see herself and others in a different light. She makes new friends, is adopted by a little girl, begins to develop an imagination and decides that thinking is a truly bewildering occupation.

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The Sheldon Six—Rose

CHAPTER I

THE SONG OF THE TRAIN

THE taxicab had been late and so delayed in reaching the station that, as soon as Rose saw the outside clock, she realized they had no time to spare. There was not a porter in sight, so, in her quick way, she divided up the bags and packages and sent her father and the children on ahead while she stayed behind to pay the driver. Then, with the largest suit-case and a good-sized package, she hurried after them. As she raced along the platform, cheeks rosy, bright hair blown and curly about her face, brown eyes shining, several persons turned to watch her join the tall man who was hurrying along with two girls and a boy.

“Let me carry the lunch-box,” the boy said as his sister caught up with them, and he tried to pull it out from under her arm.

“No, you don’t,” Rose answered firmly, taking a fresh grip on the package. “I’ve had the care of this ever since we started, and I’m not going to have

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it lost or left behind now. Chase ahead, Jimsey, and get a seat for Father."

Having guided her family into the car, Rose could see only one wholly empty seat, and into that she steered Father and Susan. Daddy had got up with one of his blinding headaches and he submitted to Rose's generalship without a murmur. As usual, Susan protested but that made no difference to her stern elder sister who was looking to see where Connie and Jim would find room to bestow themselves. When that was accomplished Rose went farther back in the car, and dropped down in the seat with a woman who rather ungraciously moved several packages to make a place for her.

"Is it now we're going to open the lunch-box?" Susan, who had slid out of her seat almost as soon as she got into it, asked the question in a hissing whisper in Rose's very ear.

"Goodness, Susan, don't take my head off! And don't bother me about that lunch again. We're not going to have it till we get out of this train and into the next one, but that won't be long. Besides you had a hearty breakfast."

"I could 'most always eat a little something—one of Effie's sandwiches, or—or a cooky," Susan persisted, knowing sadly that argument was useless, but willing to expend her best efforts in the cause.

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"No, sir! Effie put up that lunch so's we could have it this noon, and it's not going to be opened till then. Don't you remember everything's packed so it will keep moist and nice? We couldn't open it on this crowded train, anyway. And—mercy, Susan, someone's going to get your seat if you don't look out. That man almost took it."

"I left Gewaldine there. He wouldn't sit on her," Susan answered calmly, and then, "Couldn't you pos-sib-ly let me hold the lunch-box so's I could look at the outside?"

"No! I'm the only one who can guard that box, and it's going to stay right on my lap. You go back and take care of Daddy. I put you there because you don't need as much room as Connie does."

"You're only saying that to make me sit still," Susan remarked, with a lingering look at the neatly-wrapped lunch-box, but she departed, nevertheless.

Left to herself, Rose felt it was a relief to be able to share the seat with a stranger and be as gloomy as she pleased. On Daddy's account they were taking two days instead of one for the journey to Brookfield, and yesterday, which was the longest part of the trip, Rose had sat with her father and had tried to seem interested and happy. She was sure she had tried, because it made her feel two-faced, and she had always prided herself that what-

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ever else she might be she wasn't that. The worst of it was she was afraid Daddy could see straight through her, and knew all the time she hated the idea of spending the summer in a little country town.

She stared out of the window unseeingly as the train hurried through small towns, with now and again a quickening rush when there came long stretches of wooded country, freshly green in its spring garb. After a while the rhythmic sound of the car-wheels possessed her ear, and words fitted themselves to it. "You've got to go—you've got to go—you've got ——"

"Well, don't I know it?" her mind interrupted crossly. When her father had been taken ill some weeks before, and the doctor said this change was the quickest way to get him well, Rose had responded with such unexpected cheerfulness that she had surprised her family and even herself. At the first moment of finding that Daddy was tired out and needed to be taken care of, it had seemed to her that no sacrifice on her part could be too great. Then, as the days went on, as she realized how hard it would be to leave her friends, and was assured by nearly every girl she met that by going away from Melford she would miss the happiest summer of her life, she began to consider herself a real martyr.

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“Ellis is the only one who knows how I really feel about it,” she thought with a sigh. “Unless Daddy suspects. Nan’s in such a blaze of glory over taking the family to her house that she couldn’t possibly believe anyone might hate to go.”

The tune of the car-wheels caught her ear again. “You’ve got to go—you’ve got to ——” she shook herself free from the persistent, irritating sound. “I wish they had let me start ahead with Ellis,” her thought ran on. “He and I could have got the place ready in no time for Father and the rest. I can work lots harder than Anne.” It did not occur to her that though she could work harder she rarely ever did, and that was why Anne was more to be depended upon.

Towns and forests, sparkling brooks and distant hills flashed by as the train sped on, but to Rose there was nothing interesting, nothing beautiful in the landscape. After a long while her gaze came back into the car again, and as she looked along the aisle she could see Susan on her knees, with her arms on the back of the seat, nodding and winking at someone in the rear of the car. Rose frowned and made an imperative gesture which caught her sister’s eye and caused her to slide slowly out of sight. The next instant she realized that of course it was Jimsey at whom Susan was smiling, and she turned her head in time to see him wriggle out from

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beside a fat man, and start on a swaying progress toward her.

"It's the next station, Rose," he said as he reached her side. "I asked the conductor, and he says we've got to be lively 'bout getting out, 'cause it's only a junction and this train's in a hurry."

"Tell me some news. You're hoarse as a crow, and your face is dirty, and your hair's a fright."

"Well, I guess yours would be." Jim put up a grimy hand to smooth his fair locks, and blinked his smarting eyes. "The smoke's awful choky, and that man in the seat with me rubs my hair the wrong way every time he thinks of it."

"Wet the corner of this handkerchief and I'll scrub some of the dirt off your face," ordered Rose.

Jimsey backed away with a grin. "No, sir," he said firmly. "You're not going to wash my face before all these people. When it comes to that your own face isn't so awfully clean."

Much to his joy, Rose hastily opened the vanity-case which had been a parting gift from some of the girls and consulted a small mirror, while her young brother departed, pleasantly conscious that he had given her something besides his own blemishes to worry about. "She needn't think just because she's pretty and—and hair-curly that dirt won't stick to her," he mused, as he was jerked from side to side along the aisle. Jimsey was an artistic

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soul, even though his last birthday had been only the eighth, and he secretly admired the prettiness of this sister; but, as he wisely concluded, there were other things that counted for more in the long run.

"Say, Connie, we're going to get off pretty soon," he said suddenly in the ear of a plump, brown-haired girl, who had had no hint of his approach and was satisfyingly startled.

"How long?" demanded his sister, tearing herself from the rapt contemplation of a worsted bag carried by the woman who sat beside her. She had been wondering if blue roses and green violets grew in this part of the country, and whether the woman herself had worked this amazing impossible bouquet.

"Oh, 'bout half an hour. And say, Connie, wouldn't I better tell Susan to come and stand by you the minute the train begins to slow up? Daddy's got two suit-cases and a headache, and he ought not to be bothered by a child."

"I'll take care of her," said Connie, speaking softly, because she hated to disturb the slumber of her seatmate. As Jimsey left her she looked at her father, who was sitting with closed eyes. She wished she could go and put her hands on his forehead the way she did at home, but of course that wouldn't do on a crowded train.

Plunk! Connie turned sharply to find her seat-

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mate just waking from her nap, and beginning to grope for her bag which had slipped to the floor.

"Let me get it for you," offered Connie, stooping and bobbing up again all in the same moment with the bag in her hand.

"Scatteration! And thanks! I hope to goodness there isn't anything broken. I've got some little things in there I wouldn't break for a good deal. I carried them partly on account of their being safer."

There was a hint of laughter in her voice as she said the last words, and Connie smiled in response to the twinkle in the dark eyes that looked out from a weather-beaten face, brown as a nut. She had short grayish hair, and wore a mannish hat and coat, and Connie's ready imagination suggested that she resembled an elderly sea-captain dressed up as a woman. There was nothing manly about her pleasant soft voice, however, nor about the anxiety she showed in investigating the contents of her bag. Connie gazed in astonishment at the number of small articles its gaping mouth revealed. One would hardly have supposed it could hold so many small boxes, which, unless their covers belied them, contained pins and hooks and eyes, buttons and snaps.

"I brought these because I was in such a hurry for them," the woman remarked, "not because I

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was afraid they'd break." She took out a larger box which she opened carefully, disclosing a tiny set of doll's furniture. Her strong-looking brown fingers handled the fragile things more delicately than anyone would have believed possible, and having satisfied herself that all the little arms and legs were intact, she breathed a sigh of relief. "Aren't they cunning?" she questioned, turning with a smile to Connie. "I got three more sets. I had the others sent, but I just had to bring this one for Emeline to see."

Connie admired the little chairs and tables enthusiastically, but did not venture to touch one. She was burning to ask who Emeline was and why they needed four sets of furniture, and so many pins and hooks and snaps, but the knowledge that Rose was behind her and would perhaps notice that she was talking to a stranger made her restrain her questions. Probably Emeline was her child and she was a dressmaker; they were always using and losing pins. Anyway, before they started on this journey, the last thing Rose had said to her had been, "Now, Con, don't talk to people and tell 'em all about the family," and, of course, if she asked questions perhaps her neighbor would. Being twelve years old she supposed she ought not to feel so friendly with strangers. With a little sigh she stifled the remarks she wanted to make, and turned to look at Rose who

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was next to her in age, but nearly three years older. It often seemed strange to Connie that not quite three years could make such a difference in feelings.

It startled her to find that Rose was apparently looking straight at her, but after Connie had smiled reassuringly she realized that her sister's frowning gaze wasn't seeing her at all. So she turned back again just as her seatmate was putting the last boxes in her bag, and the woman looked up at her with a smile. "Going far?" she inquired pleasantly.

"Only to Shannon Junction on this train," Connie answered, squirming under the consciousness that Rose's eyes were boring holes in the back of her head.

"I get out at the Junction, too. Where do you go from there?"

Connie drew a deep breath; of course it would be rude not to answer when anyone took so much interest as this. "We're going to Brookfield to stay all summer in the house our Aunt Serena left to Anne. We're the Sheldons." She got it out as fast as she could, wanting to accomplish something before Rose could descend upon her. Then, not feeling a hand on her shoulder, she stole another glance at her sister only to discover that now she was looking out of the window.

"The Sheldons! Well, I heard you were coming about this time. I thought there were more of you,

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though." The woman again smiled at her so pleasantly that Connie's unconquerable friendliness responded at once.

"Oh, there are, and right up to the last day we expected all to come together, but then it was decided that Effie, our housekeeper, and Rex, my dog, should stay behind and get things ready for the people who are going to rent the house. That is I don't mean Rex is going to get the house ready," Connie explained breathlessly. "And then Anne and Ellis, they're my oldest sister and brother, you know, at least you don't know, but they are, went on ahead to make things comfortable for Father. Daddy hasn't been very well, and——" She did not finish her sentence, and her eyes sought her father who was rubbing his forehead wearily.

"He does look rather tired out, doesn't he?" said the new friend sympathetically, "but you wait till he's had a chance to breathe Brookfield air for a while; he'll be skipping around like a three-year-old before you know it." Her manner was so kind and reassuring that Connie could have hugged her. "I've been away for a few days," she added, "but I dare say Emeline knows a good deal about your family. If she doesn't it's because the neighbors haven't done their duty by her." Her twinkling eyes made this seem the best joke in the world.

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"Perhaps the neighbors don't know it. Anne's very quiet. But they could have heard Ellis a mile off," answered Connie, and then, emboldened by their growing intimacy, added, "Is Emeline your little girl?"

"She is and she isn't," was the woman's perplexing response. She was drawing up the strings of her bag, and searching for numerous small packages concealed around her. Then her face crinkled into an engaging smile. "I'm Miss Eunice Dean," she said. "We live at Brookfield; not far from your house. Come and see us soon and make Emeline's acquaintance."

"Thank you," replied Connie faintly. She was wondering what Rose would say if she should tell her that already she had an invitation to call on someone. She almost wished she did not feel so much interest in the affairs of others. Miss Dean! Then she couldn't be Emeline's mother. Perhaps she was her aunt. It would be nice to know whether Emeline was about twelve. She wanted to ask, but instead put her hand on her lips and sat primly silent, trying to think of something else. Presently she realized that the train was going more slowly, that Susan was coming toward her, and that she must be ready to get off.

"I'm hungry as a bear, and my tongue aches 'cause I've kept it so still." Susan was leaning on

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the arm of the seat and regarding Miss Dean with curious eyes. "Is he going to get off here, too?" she added in a loud whisper.

"Sh! She isn't a man," Connie answered softly, thanking her lucky stars that her seatmate had just stooped to the floor to recapture a parcel which had slipped from her grasp. "And you needn't worry about being hungry. You know what's going to happen when we get on the next train, don't you? Lunch! Um—um!"

"Come on," cried Susan, much cheered by the pleasing vision fashioned by these words. "Hurry! There's Wose shaking her hand at us."

Connie flung a smile at Miss Dean as she was pulled along the aisle by the vigorous Susan. The next moment they were all on the platform and the train was puffing away.

CHAPTER II

A LIGHT BOX

"OH, such a blue sky! Such green trees!" exulted Connie, setting her suit-case on the platform, and gazing with delighted eyes. It was early afternoon, and the sunshine was warm, and the air full of the sweetness of spring.

"Hardly a house in sight," murmured Rose in spite of herself, and then hoped that her father had not heard. "Where's the Brookfield train? I thought it would be here waiting for us."

"So it oughter," said a man who had lounged out from the small building that served as a station. "Good-afternoon, Miss Eunice. I guess you've got quite a wait this time. Somethin's happened to the old girl—sprained her ankil or somethin'," he laughed as if it were a joke to sprain one's ankle, and Connie looked at him indignantly. "They've jest 'phoned over to say they'll git her here as soon as they can."

"But where's the train?" demanded Susan, marching up to look the man squarely in the eye.

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"Rose said I could have my lunch on that train, and I'm starved. Does it have to wait for that girl's ankle to get well?"

"Sure it does. The old girl has to haul the train over here and then haul you back." He was looking at her without a smile.

"With a sprained ankle!" gasped Connie, and then blushed when the man laughed.

"He means the engine is broken," Rose explained with a superior air, but even she turned to her father for confirmation.

"That's it, I'm afraid," Mr. Sheldon answered soberly. The cheerful courage which had always supported his children was not easily summoned now, and his face looked drawn and white. "Anyway, we can sit down somewhere and you children can have your lunch," he ended wearily.

"Goody! It'll be like a picnic." Connie was overjoyed. Then, her eye falling on her seatmate who had drawn the station-master to one side and was questioning him, "Couldn't we ask her to lunch with us? There'll be plenty, and she's the only other person to get off here. I—I know her name."

"Now, Con, you shan't be dragging us into knowing everyone around here," began Rose, but got no farther, for the woman her sister had wanted to invite was coming toward them.

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"Mr. Sheldon, I'm Miss Eunice Dean," she said, offering her hand in manly fashion. "I got acquainted with your daughter on the train, and she said you were not feeling well. Now, if you are able to take a five minutes' walk with me I can promise you a good cup of tea and something to eat. If there was any way I could bring it to you and have it really good I'd be glad to. I'm sorry"—she turned directly to Rose—"it's too bad I can't take you all, but I'm afraid my friends might not be ready for quite so many. I'm sure I can bring something back to you, though."

"Thank you, don't trouble; we have our lunch," Rose answered with a coolly indifferent air.

"Oh, Daddy, do go," Connie put in quickly, longing to shake her sister for her lack of cordiality. "I'm sure the tea will do you good. We'll eat our lunch while you're gone and be all ready for—for the 'old girl' when she does come." Her bubbling laugh made her father's face brighten in spite of his pain.

"Thank you very much, Miss Dean. I shall be glad to go," he said gratefully. "Rose is commander of this expedition, so I'm not needed. You can manage without me, can't you, Posy?"

"Yes, of course," Rose answered hastily, as if her conscience were prompting her to make up for her indifference of the moment before. "And do try

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to drop that headache somewhere on the way, Daddy. Anne and Ellis will say I haven't taken good care of you."

"And she has, hasn't she, dear-r-rest Daddy?" Susan, who, whenever she could remember it, was making heroic efforts to say the letter "r" as it should be said, rolled it proudly this time. "And she's taken nawful good care of the lunch-box. I'm so hungry I could eat that lunch if 'twas chips."

"Get busy then," laughed Miss Eunice Dean. "There's a nice place to picnic under those trees if you're not too citified to climb a stone wall."

Rose, having a moment before fixed on that very spot as the best one possible for a lunch place, now looked around for another one. She could not have told why she felt like disagreeing with this woman, who so evidently wanted to be kind to them, but as she watched her father and Miss Dean walk off together, she made up her mind that she did not like persons who got acquainted so quickly and tried to manage other folks' affairs.

"Let's go ——" she began, but Susan was already proving her ability to climb a stone wall, and Connie and Jim were not far behind her.

"Get the lunch-box, Jimsey," Rose called, as she, too, started toward the wall. "I left it right there with the suit-cases and things."

"It's a wonder you'd let anyone touch it,"

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grumbled Jim, turning back. "Where'd you put it? I don't see any lunch-box."

"Well, it's there," Rose said impatiently. "Look under Daddy's coat."

"What did you cover it up for? Did you think one of us would run away with it?" Jim brought to light a package and made a wild dash for the wall, arriving at the picnic spot just as Susan was spreading a diminutive handkerchief on her lap. "That's for my cr-r-rumbs," she remarked happily. "After I've eaten every bit I can I'm going to call the birds."

"Huh! This box is pretty light. I don't believe there'll be anything left for birds." Jim had given the package to Rose and was watching her with doubting eyes while she untied the string.

"I thought it was heavy enough while I was lugging it," Rose said quickly, and instinctively lifted the box. "Why—why ——" she stammered, looking half-accusingly at Jim, as if by some magic he had managed to change the weight, "it does seem lighter, but the paper's the same—and the string was like this." Her eyes held a wild astonishment; underneath everything she felt a cold certainty that things had gone wrong with her, but she refused to believe that fate could play her so shabby a trick. "It just seems lighter, I suppose, because I was carrying that heavy suit-case before," she mur-

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mured with an attempt at cheerfulness as she twitched at the knot.

"Cut it," advised Jimsey, offering his knife, but Rose still tugged at the string with the air of one who would postpone a disagreeable discovery as long as possible.

"I'm starving hungwy," remarked Susan, breaking a silence which had lasted at least a moment. So far she had not dreamed there was a chance that her hunger might not soon be satisfied, but as the string finally came untied, and Rose, with fear in her heart, unfolded the paper, sudden realization came to Susan.

"Why—why—why," she began with a whimper in her voice, "our box was a wed one. I saw Effie putting sandwiches and cakes and ——"

"And this is a white box, isn't it?" interrupted Rose with that stony coolness which sometimes seized her when she was at the point of despair and was bound others should not know it. "I guess you'll have to go without a lunch till you get to Brookfield. Someone else has ours." She set the box down, and got up from the sun-warmed grass, stretching her arms and yawning. "Too bad, Susan, but you play 'round with Jimsey and you'll forget how hungry you are."

If Anne had been there she would have guessed what distress and anger at herself Rose's indifferent

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manner covered. But to the younger children it only added to the misfortune to have her not even say she was sorry.

Susan, who almost never cried for bumps and bruises, found this too much to bear and burst into tears of anguish. "You—you wouldn't even l-let me hold it and l-look at it," she sobbed, "and now you've gone and lost it—yourself. And I can't forget how hungwy I am."

"Let's open it," Connie said hopefully. "Perhaps there's something we can eat." She took the cover from the box and lifting a layer of tissue paper disclosed two small gingham dresses and a little blue coat.

"Oh, deah!" wailed Susan, "I can't eat clothes!" Then, as no one paid any attention to her, she stopped to listen to Connie who was reading aloud a sale-slip.

"'Sold to Mrs. W. L. Brown—Redmoor.'" Connie deciphered it slowly. "I s'pose that's the woman you sat with."

"Seems likely," agreed Rose with a quick memory of a large, hot person who had grudgingly made room for her. She remembered hoping that she should never have to see that woman again. "She had a lot of bundles. But I carried the lunch package on my lap every minute—no, I didn't either—when I tried to get out the tickets it slid

A LIGHT BOX

and I put it on the floor for a second. I must have picked up one of hers."

"Daddy'll feel awful bad 'cause he had lunch and we didn't," Susan remarked in her saddest tones. "And I sh'd think, Rose Sheldon, that Anne and Ellis will say you haven't taken good care of us."

Jimsey scowled at his younger sister. "Aw, be a sport, Susan," he said earnestly. "I'm not going to tell Daddy we lost our lunch. Nor Anne nor Ellis. I bet Connie won't either."

"Of course not," Connie agreed. "Rose had a lot to do, and anyone might make a mistake like that."

Rose's face softened and she swallowed painfully. "You two are bricks," she got out at last, her throat feeling tight and full. "I—I'm frightfully sorry it happened, but I do think it will be best not to tell Daddy, because it will make him unhappy. I wasn't going to ask you not to tell, though."

"I—I'm a br-r-rick, too," Susan said hastily. "I shan't tell 'less he says, 'Susan, did you have a nice lunch?' Right out like that. Then I'd have to, wouldn't I?"

"We'll talk so fast he won't have a chance to ask anything," Connie put in before Rose could answer. "Say, Jimsey, I see something shiny in the wall over there. I'll beat you to it."

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"Me, too! Me, too!" shouted Susan, forgetting she was hungry. "What do you s'pose it is?"

"Let's play we're in—in Alaska hunting for gold, and we haven't even—even a match left, and we're—what you call 'em—mining suspects, and we see a gleam in the distant rocks ——" Jim was off swiftly.

"Not 'suspects'—experts," panted Connie after him. "And we can hear wolves baying, and only just an hour ago we've seen the track of Indians. Come on, Susan; don't let me beat you."

Rose watched them for a while, then mechanically put the paper on the box and tied it with exceeding care. She almost wished the children wouldn't be such angels about it all. It only made her feel more guilty. Perhaps it served her right for feeling so conceited over the way she had managed this journey. She tried to think of something else, but her tired mind clung desperately to the one subject. Losing the lunch was about the most awful mistake she could have made. Children were always twice as hungry when they were on a journey. What if the train shouldn't be mended for hours!

Here was this box belonging to someone else. She must do something about this. She got up and went hastily back to the little station to explain her mistake to the man in charge.

"You don't tell me you've took Mrs. W. L.

A LIGHT BOX

Brown's box," he said, looking as serious as his twinkling eyes would permit. "Jingo! I don't hanker to be in W. L.'s shoes when she finds out she ain't got it. There'll be some hyperin' for him. An' you want I should take charge of it?" He waggled his head with slow decision. "Nope! Nothin' doin' in that line. I've had dealin's with her before, and I refuse to take the responsibility of that box. You send it by passel post from Brookfield. Or, I'll tell you," he was smiling now and apparently very much pleased with himself, "you kin drive over from your place. 'Tain't so awful far, and it'll give you a nice chance to git acquainted with the Browns."

For a moment Rose was speechless. To get acquainted with these people was the last thing she wanted, but she could not tell him so. She wondered if it would do any good to coax him. Suddenly she knew that to take that box to Brookfield would be unendurable, and, before the man had time to object, she had thrust the box into his hands and run away. "You've just got to take it," she called back without stopping. "I'm not going to carry it home."

She fully expected that he would come after her with the box and that she should be obliged to take charge of it, but, to her surprise, when she dared to look back, she saw him still standing lazily in the

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doorway of the little station, with apparently no idea of trying to make her change her mind.

“That was cheeky of me, and he probably doesn’t like me very well,” she said to herself, “but I can’t help it. There are times when you have to be firm with people.”

She was climbing the wall by this time and she could see the children, not playing now, but standing in a group and evidently looking at something. A moment later Susan’s voice, full of mystery and expectation, reached her ear.

“Oh, Wose,” she called, “look at those two chilluns. What do you suppose they’ve got?”

CHAPTER III

TWINS TO THE RESCUE

ROSE's gaze, following her sister's pointing finger, fell upon two sturdy little figures approaching from the direction in which Father and Miss Dean had gone. They were making a peculiar progress, for first the girl would run a few steps ahead, and then the boy, in his eagerness to overtake her, would, in his turn, be in advance.

"Goody! Goody! They're bwinging us a pwesent!" exclaimed Susan with a joyous faith that something for her benefit was about to happen. By this time it was plain that the boy carried a pitcher, and the girl a large plate covered with a napkin.

"How can you tell it's for us?" questioned Jim; "anyway, I bet they'll spill whatever they've got." He was afraid to be too sure that something to eat was arriving, but he watched with a curiosity not less eager than Susan's.

When the approaching children had almost

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reached the Sheldons a quick run brought the boy a few steps ahead of the girl.

"M-m-m-Ma," he began, but before he could get any farther the girl, who seemed exactly the same size, ran in front of him and pushed him back with a resolute elbow.

"Now, Billy Becker, you thtop. You know Ma thaid ——"

But by this time it was the boy who was in the foreground. "Ma-m-m-Ma s-sent you s-some d-d-d ——"

"Ma thent you thome doughnutth and milk," the girl finished, almost treading on Connie's toes in her effort to step in front of her brother. "Your Pa ith at our houth."

"D-D-Dilly!" began the boy, scowling and growing very red. It looked so much as if he might be going to dash the pitcher to the ground that Susan clasped her hands and uttered an involuntary, "Oh!" Then, to their surprise, Billy's face cleared, and he sang in a high sweet voice, evidently to a tune of his own making, "I'll fix you for that, Dilly Becker."

"Oh, please, Daffy-down Dilly," said Susan, starting forward impulsively; "please, before he fixes you, let me take the doughnuts. You might spill them, you know."

"My name'th Ardelia," answered the girl sulk-

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ily, as if she thought Susan was poking fun at her. Then her black eyes snapped, and she looked at her brother with an impish grin. "There'th roundth and twithth, and Ma hopeth you haven't et too much to want 'em."

Billy gave her an anguished glance. He had forgotten this part of his mother's message, and now Dilly had said it all. Dumbly he gave the pitcher and two mugs into Rose's keeping and walked away from the group, unfortunately not so far that he failed to hear the words the triumphant Dilly flung after him.

"You mutht pleathe excuthe Billy. Ma wath thorry not to thend four mugth. Ma told him to thay tho."

Billy faced around quickly, and again the color mounted in fiery waves to the roots of his red hair. Then he turned his back on his sister and walked away a little farther, manfully sticking both hands in his pockets.

Dilly, in the meantime, had uncovered the crisp, golden-brown doughnuts, and was passing them from one to another with a very good imitation of her mother's best manner.

"Do have one," she said to Connie. "I hope you haven't had tho much lunch that you can't take a little more."

"We haven't ——" began Susan. "Ouch, Jim-

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sey, that hurts.” She put her hand on her arm that had been gently but firmly nipped by her brother. “ I—I was just going to ——”

Rose interrupted. “ It was very good of you to bring us these lovely doughnuts.” She was pouring milk as she spoke, and she gave the mug first to Susan, who subsided somewhat sulkily. Rose was smiling and looking her prettiest, and even the injured Billy was drawn back into the group in spite of himself. “ Can you keep a secret?” she went on, smiling directly at him, “ you and—and Dilly I mean?”

Billy dug his bare toes into the grass and nodded a bashful assent.

“ Yeth, of courth. What ith it?” demanded his sister, whose black hair and dark skin were such a contrast to her brother’s fairness.

“ Well, then,” proceeded Rose, “ the truth is that I was careless and lost our lunch, and if you hadn’t brought these delicious things we shouldn’t have had a bite to eat.”

“ But why do you keep it a secret?” sang Billy in his fresh little voice, for once getting ahead of his sister.

“ Because we don’t want Daddy to know. We thought it would worry him,” explained Connie.

“ He thaid you had a nithe lunch, but that hith children could alwayth make room for thuch dough-

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nutth and thuch milk," observed Dilly with pride. "But I won't let Billy tell. Of courth you wouldn't want your Pa to know you'd been tho careleth." Dilly's manner was patronizing, and Rose laughed in spite of herself.

"We were afraid it would trouble him if he found out we had nothing to eat," she said quickly, "and the others were dandy about not telling. Daddy knows anyway that I'm always careless if I have the chance to be."

"A great grown-up girl like you careleth?" demanded Dilly, her dark eyes very big. "I didn't know grown-upth ever thaidthey were anything bad." To her seven years, Rose seemed really old. "I gueth if Billy did thumthing like that the firtht thing I'd do would be to tell. You're a funny family." She went off into a peal of ringing laughter, and the Sheldons, who had been politely trying to conceal their own amusement, joined her heartily.

"Oh—oh!" gurgled Jimsey, rolling on the grass in pure gratitude for this chance to laugh. "We are a funny family, aren't we, Rose? I never knew before how—how ridiculous we are."

"Get up," answered Rose, gently poking him with the toe of her shoe. "That's no way to behave when you have callers."

"Why don't you do it harder?" asked Dilly. "I would if 'twath Billy."

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"You b-b-bet she w-would," Billy put in spiritedly. "There goes the school-b-b-bell." And then again he lifted his voice in song, "Give me the pitcher and Dilly the plate. We've got to run or we'll be late."

"Why-why-why," began Susan, stammering in her eagerness. "That was poetry. Did you hear, Connie? He sang poetry."

"That'th eathy for him," his sister said proudly. "He can do that motht any time, can't you, Billy?"

Billy nodded, and concealed his blushes by collecting the pitcher and mugs. Then, poised for flight, he chanted, "Good-bye, I'm glad I came to-day. The next time I will longer stay." In another breath he was off like an arrow, with the mugs clinking perilously against the pitcher.

"It ithn't polite to thay you'll thtay longer," shrieked Dilly after him. With one motion she gathered in the plate and napkin. "My good-neth, he'll get home firtht," she moaned. "And I jutht have to tell Ma all about you." She was off, running swiftly, and as her bobbing black head disappeared down the hill it looked as though she were gaining.

"I hope he gets there in time to sing a little song to his mother," observed Jim, who had a fellow feeling for Billy.

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"So do I," agreed Connie. "Oh, I can see Daddy way in the distance. Let's race."

When they came back, Rose, who had not gone with the others, noticed that Susan's hand was fast in Miss Dean's, and that Connie was close to her on the other side.

"Well, how do you like the Becker twins?" questioned Miss Dean as they came within hearing distance.

"Think of it! Twins!" repeated Connie. "And they don't look the least bit alike."

"They are one of our prize exhibits," Miss Dean said with a comfortable chuckle. "What they can't think of to do when they're in the mood for mischief isn't worth mentioning. And between times Dilly tries to make Billy a better boy."

"I should think she did," murmured Jim. "If I had a sister like that I'd—I'd ——"

"Would you fix her—the way Billy said ——?" demanded Susan, who had been wondering what this mysterious method implied.

"Try me and see," answered Jim, attempting a threatening glare, which did not suit his pleasant fairness and only made Susan giggle. Whereupon Jim grinned sheepishly and walked off to patrol the wall, from which, a while later, a joyous whoop came back to them. "She's coming," he shouted; "the 'old girl's' coming."

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"Huh! I should call it a baby tr-r-rain 'stead of an old girl one," said Susan, as she looked with disdain at the engine with its one car attached. "I don't think that's stwong enough to carry all of us Sheldons."

"What do you think we are—a caravan?" Jimsey enjoyed puzzling his younger sister with hard words. "Don't you see that it's a sitting-car with a baggage-car on the end? Come on, let's watch 'em put the trunks in."

Rose, a little afraid that the station-master would insist upon her taking the box, kept out of his neighborhood and as close to her father as she could. Except for an occasional quick glance she would not even look in his direction for fear that she might see him approaching, but to her surprise and relief he busied himself with the trunks and did not come near her.

Later, sitting beside her father, and wholly unresponsive to Miss Dean's attempt to point out the beauties of the landscape, Rose lost the pleasanter mood of a while before. It had been such a relief then to think that the children need not go hungry through her mistake that she had forgotten her own troubles for the moment; now it all came back to her, and as the little engine puffed up-hill, clattered around curves, and broke the country stillness with its shrill whistle she grew more and more

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unhappy. She hated the country, she did not want to know these people, she knew she was going to have a dreadful summer, she—suddenly a memory of the twins flashed into her mind, and she smiled in spite of herself.

Her father, who had been watching her, looked relieved. "It's not going to be so bad, after all, is it, Posy?" he asked anxiously.

"No-o." Rose, with a sigh as unconscious as her smile, came back to a contemplation of her surroundings. The children were shouting with laughter over something Miss Dean was telling them, and pointing out to each other the scattered houses, the roomy barns, the overshadowing hills with a joy which to Rose seemed cruel. Then, suddenly aware that her father was gazing at her questioningly, she tried to smile and look interested too. "We seem to be going up and up, don't we, Daddy? I'll be glad when we get there, won't you?"

"Yes, but I feel much better than I did this morning and I love these hills. That country dinner, and the walk with Miss Dean, who is a very interesting woman, did me good."

"Interesting?" Rose repeated unbelievably.

Her father laughed. "Yes, just that," he affirmed. "If you are worth as much as I think you are you'll find out some day how much she

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means to her neighbors. Why she ——” but just then Susan and Jim came flying to Daddy with a question to be answered, and Rose settled back into her own thoughts again.

It was curious, she decided, that Miss Dean should have talked about herself and should have told Father how much she meant to her neighbors. She must have done so, of course, or else how should he know? Rose was quite sure she couldn't like a woman who would do that, and she wished the children wouldn't be so friendly with her. Probably between them they had told her the family history by this time.

It was late afternoon when an outburst of joy from the children greeted Miss Dean's announcement that Brookfield was very near, and after that things happened in a hurry. As the train stopped before the small station there was Anne, flushed and smiling, and actually dancing a little in her joy, in spite of her sixteen years.

“Daddy, darling, it seems a year that I've been away from you,” she said happily. “And there's Ellis with our carriage—it's big even if it isn't beautiful—and ——”

“Anne, I want you to meet Miss Dean, one of our neighbors, who has been away since your arrival. Miss Dean, this is Anne, and she is the mainspring of the family.” Father had his arm

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around his eldest daughter and was drawing her forward.

"You know," added Connie, squeezing Miss Dean's hand, "I told you about our family car, and that Anne is the steering-gear."

Rose, standing a little apart from the others, frowned over this. She might have known that Connie would tell everything she could; and things like that sounded so foolish when they were repeated. She turned her back on her family and walked toward Ellis, who was holding the horse and waiting impatiently. Near the carriage was an automobile which she supposed must belong to Miss Dean. She wished theirs was a car instead of a funny-looking old carriage.

"Miss Dean asked some of us to go with her," said Jimsey, catching up, "but Daddy thought we all ought to be together when we see Anne's house for the first time."

"Aren't you ever coming?" shouted Ellis. "Rose, you hold Mr. Bonaparte, please, while I help with the bags. He won't mind the train if you'll only talk lovingly to him."

Rose, feeling a little dismayed by the sudden, penetrating glance Mr. Bonaparte bestowed upon her, held him, nevertheless, and rubbed his weather-beaten nose until the family and the bags were tucked into the capacious carriage. Then she

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mounted into the front seat beside Ellis, and listened without a word to a tale of what had been done in the three days he and Anne had been here.

"It's pretty country, don't you think?" he broke off suddenly. "All those trees and the mountain over there. Some day we'll climb it."

Rose assented listlessly. To her the stillness, and the green stretches of houseless land were appalling. It made her feel, as noise never did, that she wanted to put her hands over her ears and shut her eyes and run somewhere—to any place where she could be in the midst of things again.

"Aren't there—aren't there any houses?" she asked appealingly.

"Why, surely. There's a village. Wait till we get over this hill we're coming to and you'll see it." Ellis flapped the reins and approached the hill in fine style, but Mr. Bonaparte had other plans; at the first indication of a rise in the ground he stopped as if he were going to sit down, and dejectedly dropped his head.

"He thinks there are too many of us," said Connie, who was very tender-hearted in regard to animals. "I'll get out and walk up the hill."

"You take the reins, Rose, and I'll walk, too." Ellis scrambled out over the bags that surrounded his feet and went to the horse's head. "Now look

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here, there are two of the heavy-weights out, and you can just go on."

Mr. Bonaparte shook himself and braced his feet with a mild and melancholy air. Then he glanced back over his shoulder as if trying to get a view of the carriage.

"I believe the weird old thing is trying to count you," frowned Ellis, who would have preferred a more stylish steed.

"I'll get out," offered Jimsey, "and you come too, Susan. Then we'll walk up the hill, and he'll see we're trying to do the fair thing by him."

This was done, but the melancholy Mr. Bonaparte seemed to have no sense of fairness and only turned his head once more toward the carriage.

"Why, I know what he wants. How stupid of me not to think of it before," said Anne, jumping out hastily. "Ezra told me what Aunt Serena used to do when the horse acted like this, and I came prepared." She took a lump of sugar out of her pocket and, with some inward shrinking, held it on the palm of her hand under Mr. Bonaparte's broad nose. In the midst of his crunching she let him sniff at a second lump, and then she began to walk slowly, holding the sugar just out of his reach. With the air of one who has gained his point, Mr. Bonaparte followed step by step up the hill.

"Take off your hat, Nan, and maybe he'll think

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you're a carrot and go faster," said Ellis with a chuckle.

"Mean thing! I don't care if my hair is red!" laughed Anne, too pleased over her little triumph to mind anything. "I wonder if carrots wouldn't do, though. Sugar is so expensive. There! Take it, you greedy thing," she ended, as they reached the top of the hill. "Now pile in and in about ten minutes we'll be home."

This last cheerful word made Rose frown again. It would never be home to her, she told herself, and she wished Anne wouldn't be so exasperatingly delighted over it all. That got on her nerves and made it harder for her to bear. And then by some chance she turned to look at her father, and the sight of him, hat off, curly hair ruffled by the breeze, his contented eyes taking in the landscape, pricked her with shame. Of course it did not matter how unhappy she might be, she thought dully, if only Daddy could get well again. It was up to them to manage the family car together as Anne had said. Rose wished that it were a real car instead of an imaginary one, and that she might drive it. She wondered if Daddy would ever have enough money so that they could buy —

"Come back," said Ellis, nudging her with his elbow as they struck level ground once more. "Now that we're down that hill I shall dare to talk

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again. I'm always so afraid Mr. Bonaparte will sit down. He looks as if he would."

"‘Always so afraid,’" repeated Rose with a laugh. "I should think you and Anne had been here years by the way you talk. I can fancy Anne going about the country with a string of carrots about her neck to get this animal up the hills."

Mr. Bonaparte twitched an ear in her direction as if he were thoughtfully considering her remark.

"He doesn't like to be called ‘this animal,’" Connie observed with sympathy. "He wants to belong to the family."

"We might call him Uncle Bony," suggested Jim.

"Huh! I won't have a horse for my uncle," Susan retorted scornfully, and then, as the carriage made a sudden turn she squealed with delight. "Why—why, it's just like my Noah's ark I used to have. White houses—green blinds—trees!"

"This," said Ellis with an air, "this is the main avenue of Brookfield. Just ahead of us, ladies and gentlemen, you will see the square with its beautiful old trees, and that imposing building on the right is the post-office."

"And now we go down this tree-shaded avenue," went on Anne, taking up the rôle of showman, "with its many houses ——"

"Please ring off," interrupted Rose. "Many

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houses! I've counted four since we passed the post-office. Oh, is this—is this Aunt Serena's house?"

"No, it's Anne's. Pile out," answered Ellis, as Mr. Bonaparte stopped without waiting to be told.

"We never can get in that—all at the same time," Rose murmured blankly as she stepped from the carriage.

"Yes, we can," Anne assured her. "Come on in and look at it. There's a part you can't see from the front."

Father was going up the walk smiling at Susan and Jim and Connie, who were chattering like sparrows. Rose followed laggingly, and after her came Ellis with all the bags he could carry.

"I should say you had enough dunnage," he grumbled, as he dropped his burden in the hall. "Bags and more bags! Bundles and boxes!"

At the last word Rose turned suddenly. "What box ——" she began, and then her glance fell on a square paper-covered package which might have held luncheon for a starving family, but, to her own knowledge, had not served that purpose. "Why—why, who put that box on the train?" she demanded so angrily that the others attended to her at once.

"I did," Jimsey responded in all innocence. "The station-man said it would be easier for those folks to get it from here than from the Junction, and he asked me to—to take charge of it." His

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voice faltered a little at the end, for Rose was frowning fiercely at him.

“You knew I didn’t want to bring it here,” she began, forgetting that no one had been present at her interview with the station-man. “Why didn’t you ask me instead of taking it when he told you? Now we shall have to get acquainted with more people. And Connie talked with Miss Dean, and—and those twins came ——”

“It was a very good thing I did talk with Miss Dean, and you know it.” In her earnestness Connie went close to her sister and shook a plump finger at her. Her dark eyes, usually so soft, blazed with indignation, but she kept her voice very quiet, so that Father, who had gone on with Anne, should not hear. “I don’t care if you are ’most three years older, I think you’re silly ’bout not wanting to know people. And it’s mean to blame Jimsey. I don’t see how he could do anything else. He was the very first one to say he wouldn’t tell about ——” she pulled herself up with a gasp of dismay. “Anyway, I’ll say right now that I’m going to get acquainted with my neighbors, and you needn’t try to stop me.”

“And I yam, too,” remarked Susan, who was always helpful when a disagreement was in progress. She ranged herself by Connie and returned Rose’s frown with interest.

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“What’s all this?” Anne demanded softly, coming back from the living-room, where she had introduced her father to the most comfortable chair. “This is a—a—well, it’s not a nice way for the family to christen my little house.” She was thinking fast as she spoke; it would be easy enough to soothe Connie, but to say the convincing thing to Rose was difficult. “Let’s talk quietly so Daddy won’t hear,” she went on after a moment. “The rest of us must remember that Rose hates to come here, and so it’s harder for her than for us. And she’s tried to keep it from Daddy.”

Anne had struck the right note. In her own mind Rose was immediately restored to the pinnacle from which Connie’s plain speaking had toppled her, and if only one person realized that she was a martyr it made it easier to go on being heroic. She put out her hand to Jimsey. “Sorry, Jim. I s’pose you thought that was the right thing to do. And for all I care, Con, you may get acquainted with all the people here and in the surrounding towns.” Then she turned to Anne and Ellis. “That box has somebody’s child’s dress in it,” she said indifferently. “I shall have to send it by parcel post. I—I picked it up instead of our lunch-box. The kids can tell you about it.”

“Daddy had a real dinner, and we didn’t miss the lunch—much.” It was like Connie to be sorry

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right away and eager to make amends. "And it was fun to have those queer twins bring us doughnuts and milk. But let's not stop now to talk about it. Aren't you going to show us the whole house right away, Anne?"

"Of course—this minute, if you like. And then we'll have an early supper and go to bed with the chickens."

"Where do they sleep?" questioned Susan, looking dissatisfied. "I'd wather have a bed of my own."

"You shall," smiled Anne. "Let's go and find it," and she led the way gaily, fervently hoping that her little house would seem as friendly and cosy to the others as it did to her.

Some hours later, Rose, lying tired and unrelaxed between sheets faintly perfumed, felt the solemn country stillness enfold her, and wondered if she should ever go to sleep. If she could only hear the rattle of a trolley-car, or the squawk of an automobile horn, or people going by with talk and laughter. She shivered at the lonesomeness of it all. "Huh! I'm a dandy part of the family machine," she said to herself with scorn. "'Accelerator,' Anne called me. I'd like to accelerate Daddy into getting well so that we could go back to Melford." The very thought of Melford made her draw in her breath with an audible sniff, and Ellis,

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who was just passing her door, came stealthily into the room.

"Say, Sis, I'll send that parcel off the first thing in the morning. I was afraid you might be worrying about it," he began, but Rose's hand shot out and clutched his arm.

"Ellis, I don't see how we're going to stand it," she said fretfully. "It's such a queer, horrid, still little place. I shall never get to sleep."

"Wait till you've worked hard for a day or two. I can hardly keep my eyes open," Ellis answered. "Honestly, it isn't half bad here," he went on eagerly. "There'll be lots of things you and I can chum in on, just as we always have."

"Oh, you're only trying to make me feel pleasant." Rose was wearily obstinate. "Anne gives me a pain; she's so cheerful about everything, and now if you join in—anyway, you can't get me to believe I shall be anything but wretched."

"Well, if you stick it out on that line, probably you won't. I believe, though, that we're going to have a dandy summer, and I advise you to get on the band-wagon." Ellis' mouth opened in a yawn that his sister could hear but not see. "Well, so long. I shall go by-by here if I'm not careful. Now go to sleep, old girl, and get out of the right side of the bed in the morning."

Rose listened to the soft thud of his slippers

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feet, and felt even more lonely than she had before. It had been some comfort to feel that Ellis was agreeing with her and being a martyr, too, but if he were going to be so changeable as this, there would be no one to sympathize with her.

She turned her back on a silver moon which had slipped silently into view, and cuddled her cheek into the pillow. Life seemed very hard to her just now, and the four months ahead unending. After a time, she was sure it was hours, she lost all sense of this still Brookfield, and found herself walking in Melford and choosing the busiest streets.

CHAPTER IV

A CHOICE OF ROOMS

SUNSHINE instead of moonlight was filling the room when Rose awoke, and for a moment she fancied that her wish had been granted, and that she was once more surrounded by the noise and excitement of a large town. Then she realized that the tumult was caused by Connie and Susan and Jim who were exploring the garden and seemed to be trying to capture a roaming hen. Connie's irresistible mirth drew her, and she slipped out of bed and over to the window where she knelt with her chin on her arms.

The hen was a large brown one, and evidently of a determined nature, for she side-stepped Jim, evaded the clutching hands of Connie, whose eyes were almost shut with laughter, and at this moment was headed straight for Susan, who had artfully concealed herself around a corner of the henyard fence.

"Keep out of sight, Susan," gasped Jimsey, who

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between laughing and running was almost breathless. "When she gets—'round the corner—grab 'er—hold 'er tight."

"Sure I will," answered Susan, always serenely confident of her own ability. Although she could not see what was happening, she was giggling, no one could help that who heard Connie, but, nevertheless, her small figure was tense with anticipation and purpose.

Around the corner of the henyard came suddenly, half-flying, half-running, a bunch of rampant feathers, from which issued hoarse squawkings. It was enough to terrify any child not used to it, and Susan, with an answering shriek, made a perfectly excusable attempt to get out of the way of the approaching horror. In the next instant two things happened: the small girl caught her foot and lost her balance, and the hen, trying to go several ways at once, fluttered directly into the path of a plump falling body. An ordinary hen would have been killed by the blow that followed, but almost immediately there was a confusion of muffled squawks above which rose Susan's cry of triumph.

"Oh, Jimsey, I've made a touchdown. Come and see."

"I call that a foul play," said Ellis, who had come out of the house unobserved, and now in two jumps was by the side of his small sister. "Get off that

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poor little hen, you great big girl," he commanded. With one hand he pulled Susan to her feet and with the other captured the fluttering hen.

"Too bad, poor Mrs. Biddy," he soothed, stroking her ruffled feathers. "You thought the side of a house had hit you, didn't you? Perhaps it will teach you not to leave your perfectly good home again." He tossed her lightly over the fence, and once among her own, she began to cackle indignantly.

"She's telling the others all about her terrible adventure," said Connie, and then joyously, "Oh, she's Henny-Penny, and when Susan hit her she thought the sky was falling."

"Huh!" muttered Susan. "I'm not as fat as all that."

"Let's name 'em all," Connie went on. "Let's ——"

"Breakfast's pretty nearly on the table," interrupted Ellis. "Nan sent me out to tell you to come in and wash your hands." As he turned toward the house he caught a glimpse of Rose who was still kneeling by the window. "Say, you look like—like what's-his-name—oh, I know—Raphael's cherubs. Not both of them—just one, I mean. You'd better hustle; we need you. See how noble I am."

He waved something at her as he disappeared from view, and Rose saw that he was wearing an

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apron; evidently he had been helping Anne get breakfast. What had come over Ellis lately? she wondered. It was almost too much to have both him and Anne making such good examples of themselves. She began to dress in a hurry, and Rose, when she tried, could always do things quickly, partly because she did not care what confusion she left behind her. Ten minutes later she slipped into her chair at the breakfast-table with the question, "Where's Father?"

"Anne persuaded him to have his breakfast in bed this one morning," answered Ellis. "Here, Nan; I'll cook the rest of those pancakes. I rather fancy myself as a chef, and it won't hurt you to sit still for a while." He strode off into the kitchen with an alacrity that made Rose look at him with amazement. When had Ellis ever been willing to do things like this before?

"After I finish my breakfast Mr. Bonaparte and I are going on an errand," remarked Ellis, coming back after a while with a plate of brown pancakes and an air of modest pride. "Mr. B. said that Jim and Susan might go with us if they liked."

"Take me, too," Rose suggested. "I feel just like being lazy this morning."

"Oh, I thought you and Connie and I would get the work done and then we could decide about rooms," Anne said quickly. "Except for Daddy

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I didn't try to make any settled arrangements. Of course he would have the best room anyway."

"Of course," Rose agreed. She should have to help, she supposed, until Effie came, but she hated this everlasting dishwashing. "My goodness, I'll be glad when good old Effie gets here, won't you?" she remarked fervently. "I'd like some of her hot toast this minute."

"Get down earlier and make it yourself," shouted Ellis, who was only out in the hall, but might almost have been in the next county, so loud was his voice.

"Sh! El! I hoped Daddy might go to sleep again if we were quiet," warned Anne.

"Oh, sure; I forgot," answered her brother, poking his head into the room, and coming down to a whisper in his penitence. "It's such a great old day I feel like shouting. I bet this place is going to put Father in shape in no time; did you notice his face when he stood out on the porch after supper last night?"

"I should say I did," Anne responded happily. "I feel it in my bones that it's going to make him well soon."

Rose, listening, had a curious feeling of being left out. When had Anne and Ellis ever been such chums before? In spite of the fact that Anne came between them in age, Rose had always considered Ellis her particular companion, because they usually

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liked and disliked the same things. Now he and Anne seemed to be working together and understanding each other. Rose felt a queer pang of jealousy over this idea and finished her breakfast in silence.

"Come on, Con," she said as Ellis and the two children departed for the barn. "I'll clear the table and put away the dishes afterwards, and you and Anne can wash and wipe."

"You always choose the part that doesn't get your hands all squizzled," murmured Connie, who had a disconcerting way of understanding Rose's methods. "I'll wash 'em, Nan. Did Aunt Serena have a soap-shaker? I like the sudsy part of it."

Anne laughed. "I haven't discovered one yet, but we'll go shopping for it in the village."

"Oh, can you buy things here? I supposed you had to go miles away." Connie was interested at once, but Rose, who was scraping and piling dishes, heard scarcely a word about the village store where one could find almost anything from paper-dolls to lawn-mowers. "And what they don't have they order for you," Anne ended triumphantly. "It really makes you feel not so far away, Rose, when you see what they have in that store."

"I haven't been listening," Rose said with indifference. "I don't know what you're talking about." Having finished the preliminary part of

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her work she took a towel now, and Connie splashily speeded up the washing so that she might keep two busy.

"Ouch! That went into my eye. Don't splash so, Con. And do this plate over; you've left some egg on it." Rose pushed a plate back into the dishpan, and Connie's face flushed. She didn't mind doing things over, but she hated to be ordered.

"There's another shop I haven't seen yet," Anne went on, jumping hastily into the breach, "someone told me about it. It's small, and a woman—someone who isn't very strong, I think they said—keeps it. She sells baskets and fancy-work and ——"

"Sounds thrilling," Rose put in with a sleepy yawn. "Dear me! I don't believe I slept ten minutes last night." She dropped her towel on the table and began to put away the dishes.

"You see this is really quite a place," Anne was bound not to be diverted from her description of the village, "because a great many people come here for the whole summer, and they always buy a lot of things, and the stores have to keep up to them."

"People come here for all summer?" Rose repeated with a gleam of interest which made Anne hug herself. At last she had struck the right chord, she thought with rejoicing.

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"Indeed they do. There's a nice little hotel, and some of the people who live here take boarders, and off in—in that direction"—Anne whirled around and pointed vaguely—"there are ever so many lovely houses."

"Oh, well, of course, those people don't have anything to do with the natives, and that's where they'll think we belong." Rose's manner held its former listless indifference as she started into the dining-room with a tray of glasses.

"You never can tell," Connie called after her. "It will be a wonderful experience for them to have the Sheldon family here. No one knows what may happen."

"Don't be foolish, Connie." Rose came back looking gloomier than ever, Anne thought. "It isn't likely we shall know anyone we care for. I'm glad, though, that there are some nice houses," she said grudgingly. "How did you manage to find out so much in such a short time?"

"I've been here two whole days," Anne responded, "and first there was Mrs. Storson who came to clean; she talked all the time, and about half of it I couldn't understand. And then Mrs. Wilber called with a loaf of the loveliest bread I ever saw, and I learned a great deal from her. Afterwards Mrs. Hitchcock came in with some raised doughnuts, and she ——"

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"Anne Sheldon, I believe you're going to be as much of a gossip as Connie is," Rose interrupted. "I'm going out and talk to the hens; perhaps they can tell me some of the village news."

For a wonder Connie did not protest against being called a gossip, and Anne only laughed. "Don't go and chum with the hens," she coaxed. "Tiptoe up-stairs and see if Daddy wants anything. In ten minutes I'll come up, too."

Rose having departed, Anne scrubbed the dish-towels and considered her sister's problem at the same time. "Isn't it queer," her thought ran on, "that less than a year ago I didn't want to know people and now I don't mind a bit. It isn't because Rose is shy, but she's choosy. And she likes best rich, important persons, and she's mortally afraid someone will snub her because we're—well, we're not really rich." Anne wrung out the towels as if they were somehow responsible; then she shook her head. "I shouldn't say we were exactly poor, should you, Connie?" she asked casually.

"I should say not with Daddy and this nice house. Who says we're poor?"

"No one, I guess. Come on out while I hang these towels on the line. Then we'll go up-stairs."

Rose had found her father not only awake but up and dressed, and he was not to be persuaded to lie

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on the couch nor to sit in the big chair for the rest of the morning.

"I'll look at the house with you, and then Connie and I are going out to talk garden. How's that, Connie-chicken?"

"Fine," agreed Connie with an irrepressible gurgle of laughter, the word chicken having sent her mind back to Susan and the brown hen.

"This is a queer house," said Rose as the family procession started. "From the front you think there can't possibly be room enough for a family like ours, and then, suddenly, you find it."

"That's because it started as a small house and other rooms were added from time to time," answered Mr. Sheldon. "Cousin Tom put in the bathroom and the electric lights for his mother. He used to bring his family here summers, but I believe now Mrs. Tom prefers hotel life."

"I should think she would. Anyone would, I'm sure," Rose said quickly. "Fancy being able to have pretty dresses, and sit on the piazza of a big hotel, and play in tennis tournaments, and——" something in the smile with which her father was regarding her made her stop suddenly. "Well, anyway, I think it would be nice," she finished under her breath as she followed Anne into a pretty room filled with sunshine.

"Now this," explained Anne, "was Aunt Se-

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rena's guest chamber, the cleaning-woman told me. If you and I have separate rooms, Rose, one of us will have to take the little room you were in last night, and the other, this one. Then if we have company the one who sleeps here must share Connie's bed, or sleep on a couch somewhere."

"Well, I'll take the little room then," Rose decided at once. "You know I don't like changing about when there's company."

Connie giggled, and Rose turned on her sharply. "You needn't laugh. I really do hate being turned out more than the rest of you do." Somehow this sounded absurd even to her own ears. "Anyway, if I have a small room I shan't have so much space to be disorderly in," she finished sulkily.

"Rose, Rose, you ended your sentence with a preposition," her father said, quite as if that were a heart-breaking crime. "Isn't your teacher always telling you that is an exceedingly wrong thing to do?" He was smiling at her whimsically, and Rose moved to avoid his glance, but not before she had seen him take a pencil and an old envelope from his pocket and put it against the wall so that he might scribble a few words.

"Connie's room is big enough for a double bed and Susan's little bed, so it won't be any great hardship to change over occasionally. Ellis thinks he

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and Jim will like this room, and I've saved this sunny one for Effie." Anne pointed out the rooms with a feeling of proud ownership which she was doing her best not to show. "There isn't anything in Effie's room except the bed and bureau, but I want you to help me make it pretty, Rose, before she gets here."

"All right," Rose responded with a yawn. "I suppose if the exhibition's over I'd better go and get some things unpacked."

A little later, shut in her own room, Rose heard her father stop outside the door, and fancied he was coming in. The next moment she could hear him going down-stairs with Connie, and they were both talking gaily. "You'd think it was the happiest day of their lives," she said to herself bitterly as she made her bed.

"I'll do only a little at a time," she decided, as she stopped to listen to a clock that was striking ten. "I suppose Anne will need help about dinner, and I'd better offer before she has a chance to ask me." This unexpected bit of thoughtfulness made her a degree less blue until it occurred to her that probably Anne was making several beds by herself. "Oh, well," she said with a shrug, "I can't do everything; and I must get settled."

Then followed a busy hour and a half, during which Rose dug into her trunk, heaped things on

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the bed, hastily filled bureau drawers, and hung her dresses in the closet which at first had seemed small. "Big enough for anyone who doesn't have more than I have," she thought, pitying herself, as she often did, on account of the limitations of her wardrobe. "Probably I've got all I need for this place, though."

Finally she shut the trunk with a bang. "You're empty," she said with a satisfaction that was somewhat dimmed when she looked at her bureau. "What a hodge-podge! Well, I'll put everything away properly some other time." She closed the drawers with a firm hand and turned to survey the rest of the room.

"Thank goodness it's got two windows, but not even Anne could think it was pretty," she meditated, as her gaze took in the chocolate-colored paper dotted with small red flowers, the dull, yellowish-brown paint of the woodwork, and the unattractive furniture. She wondered if Anne would let her try her hand at making it over, and remembered that she had seen some old furniture tucked away in a sort of trunk-room they had peeped into this morning. With a new interest she started at once to investigate, but just as she opened her door an envelope fell into the room and made her pause. She recognized it at once as the one on which her father had scribbled while they were deciding

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about rooms, and on it was evidently a note to her.

“DEAR POSY:” it began.

“When I was a youngster my mother used to tell me about my great-aunt Harriet, and this morning you made me think of her. Mother said that when there was something on the table which this great-aunt liked very much she would often say, ‘I’ll eat what’s left of the strawberries’ (or the peaches or the cakes, as it might happen); ‘you know I like them better than the rest of you do.’

“‘A word to the wise’ from

“Your loving
“DAD.”

“Now what does he mean by that?” Rose asked herself blankly as she read the little note over for the second time. “My respected ances—ancestress was certainly a selfish thing. But what made him think to write that to me? I’m not a pig about taking things at the table, am I?”

Her inner self, to whom this last question seemed to be addressed, answered never a word, but went busily to work to stir up the recollections of the last few hours. “What did I say that made him think of that?” queried Rose uneasily, and on the instant that same inner self unlocked the memory which answered her question. As clearly as possible she could hear herself saying, “I’ll take the little room,

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then," and when Connie giggled, "you needn't laugh. I really do hate being turned out more than the rest of you do."

"Well, I do, I do, I do," Rose repeated stubbornly, quite as though the repetition would make it not only true but excusable. Then she frowned. "Connie thought that was selfish, and I suppose Anne did, only she's too polite to laugh." The thought of Anne made her realize that the morning must be nearly gone, and that if she did not hurry she wouldn't be in time to help.

"I wonder if that great-aunt of Daddy's ever helped," she was thinking as she brushed with vigorous hand the little curls that blew around her face. "I suppose Ellis and Jimsey—perhaps Susan, too—think I'm piggy. Well, it isn't every day you can get a clear picture of just where you stand with your family. Anyway, it *is* harder for some people, and I'm one of 'em." With which consoling declaration she tightened the ribbon on the end of her yellow braid and started for the door again.

"I'm not going to let Daddy know I even saw his old note," she said, pausing half-way. "Perhaps he'll think I threw it in the scrap-basket without looking." Then, with her hand on the door-knob, she stopped again. "Probably he doesn't expect me to mention it," she reflected, wise in her

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previous knowledge of her father's methods. "He's just given me the idea, and he expects me to know what to do about it. Glory! It's some stunt to live up to a family like this. Poor little old Rose doesn't belong, and she'd better get busy and stop thinking about her sins."

The next instant she was out of her room and hurrying down-stairs in search of Anne.

CHAPTER V

THE BOY IN THE WHEEL-CHAIR

"I DR-ROVE a whole mile—a whole big mile," chanted Susan, hurrying in from the customary hand-washing just as Rose entered the dining-room. "Mr. Bonyparte he looked 'wound and when he saw me he made up his mind to go lickety-split."

"Ho! Lickety-split for him is just about crawling for a fast horse," averred Jimsey, standing behind his chair the way Father and Ellis did until his sisters were seated. "He did go pretty well, though, when I drove."

"It takes an A No. 1 driver to hold the reins over that steed of Anne's," Ellis drawled. "Say, Father, do you think you'll feel well enough to go out in the garden pretty soon? I want to tell you everything I've learned this morning before I forget it."

"Daddy and I have been out already making plans," said Connie with pride.

"Fine! I thought you were going to stay in bed all the morning, Dad. This air must be doing you

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good." Ellis beamed with satisfaction. His alarm about his father's health had gone deeper than he had allowed anyone to suspect, and to see an improvement at once was more than he had dared to hope.

"I was afraid we'd be late for planting," answered Mr. Sheldon, "but Ezra tells me the season has been backward. He thinks our greatest trouble will be in getting help. It's high and scarce."

"He says he can help us a little; but his time is pretty well taken," Ellis responded soberly. "Anyway, Dad, I'm awfully strong, and you can count on me to be on the job all summer."

Anne, who had been listening quietly, was thrilled by her brother's promise. Ellis was going to play the game, she told herself exultantly. It interested Anne to think of life as a game in which, as in checkers, one played for the king-row, and often found oneself in corners from which it was difficult to escape.

"You're a trump, Ellis, and I think I can tell you what to do. And I shall be able to do a good day's work in a very short time." The old hopefulness and conviction rang in Daddy's voice as it had not in many months. "Connie and the children will help about the weeding, I'm sure, and that's no small part."

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"I intend to do almost all about the flower-garden," Connie put in. "You forgot I said I'd take that off your shoulders, Daddy."

"Excuse me, so I did," her father answered without a hint of a smile. "But you'll need some help along the first of it from Ellis and me. If we all work together we shall do great things."

Rose, taking in the conversation in unwonted silence, wondered why her father or Ellis didn't request her aid. She was almost as strong as a boy; and lots of girls had worked on farms during war-time. They had not mentioned Anne, either, but that was because she wasn't strong and had so much to do indoors. Everyone knew Anne was ready to help when she could. That was just the difference, Rose told herself with disconcerting frankness: the family was used to seeing her slide out of hard things and they didn't seem to expect her to be willing to give a push to the family machine.

"Wake up, Rose, and have some rice pudding. I put in loads of raisins because you like it that way."

Rose started. She had been so absorbed that Anne had taken the dishes into the kitchen and brought in the dessert unnoticed by her. She had meant to do that, and her conscience pricked because her sister looked tired.

"Nan, you take a nap, and I'll wash the dishes.

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I'll do everything as spick and span and pernickety as you would," she said as they rose from the table.

"Oh, I'll help," began Anne, but something in her sister's expression silenced her. "All right, you're a dear," she agreed. "I believe I could sleep a little if I tried, and I'm just pining to write a letter."

"To your beloved, wonderful Miss Graham, I suppose." Rose's tone was not pleasant. "For goodness' sake, Nan, don't ask her here this summer. There are some things I absolutely can't stand, and that's one of 'em."

"I'm not going to, but I only wish I could. She has so many friends I suppose she has more invitations than she can accept," Anne answered with a sigh. She was used to Rose's attitude toward this delightful friend of hers and she did not intend to be troubled by it. Anyway Daddy and the others liked Miss Graham.

"What makes you think she's so popular as all that?" Rose demanded, and then, because Anne looked hurt, repented. "Oh, run away, Nancy, and leave me alone, or I shall say something worse than that. I'm grouchy."

"All right," Anne said again, and straightway departed.

Nan was rather satisfying when one offered to do anything for her, Rose conceded, as she began to

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clear the table. She didn't hang around and fret about how it was to be done, but left you to manage it your own way. Which, of course, put you frightfully on honor.

As she washed and rinsed and dried the dishes her mind was busy. For some reason she fell to thinking about Anne, and she wondered if it were because her sister had tried to believe she could that she had succeeded in throwing off her shyness, and in becoming the steering-gear of the imaginary family car as Daddy had suggested. Or perhaps the wonderful Miss Jean Graham had "magicked" her and made her think anything was possible if she really tried.

Rose's lip curled a little over this last idea. "Anne is more easily influenced than I am," she said to herself. "When people preach at me I just want to go up in the air and do the very opposite."

She drew some fresh water for the cooking-dishes, and scrubbed away at them with a will, frowning impatiently when a sudden chorus of laughter floated in from the garden. It occurred to her that her family did not miss her at all. "I don't seem to belong," she told herself bitterly, "'specially now that Anne and Ellis are so chummy."

While she finished her work as carefully as she

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knew Anne would have done it she felt a great loneliness of spirit. She wished she were back in Melford and could run out and spend the afternoon with her friends. She might, she supposed, go out and see what Ellis was doing, but her feelings were too hurt for that. She would not push her advice and assistance where they were so little wanted. And even while she was thinking this something healthy and with a keen sense of justice rose up within her. "Nonsense! Of course they want you," it said. "Haven't you always been skipping off to play tennis or see someone when you were most needed? The rest of them have got used to doing without you."

"For goodness' sake! What a sermon!" Rose was startled by the realization that she was being accused by her own self, but she refused to admit her shortcomings. "I only do what other girls do," she thought excusingly. "You can only be young once, and I'm going to have a good time. At least I should if I could have stayed behind in Melford." Her mind, not the stern inner voice of a moment ago, but the mind that approved of her, dallied with the delightful possibilities of the summer in Melford, herself a welcome visitor, admired and made much of, the days, a continuous round of good times. "Oh, well," she said to herself drearily as she went up to her room, "I suppose the summer

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will go some way and I shall live through it. They needn't expect me to enjoy anything, though."

An hour later, having heard Anne proclaim that she had had a nice nap and was now ready for callers, Rose decided hastily to take a walk. If callers were likely to come she did not want to be at home.

"I'm going to explore, Nan," she said briefly, meeting her sister in the hall. "I—I'd rather go alone," she hastened to add. "Don't tell the others I've gone, please."

"I won't. If you follow this road to the left you'll come out by the lake. Ellis says it's a little more than a mile. He'd love to show it to you."

"He's busy. I suppose I ought to go out and help him—or do something for you." Rose had not meant to suggest this, but, to her own surprise, she found herself hoping that Anne would say they needed her.

But Anne, who often had an almost uncanny way of knowing what others were thinking, failed this time to understand the unconscious appeal in Rose's eyes. "Oh, we'll get along. We weren't depending on you for anything," she answered cheerfully, and then was haunted for some time by the thought that her sister had looked disappointed.

Once outside, Rose stopped to consider the different ways, and because the one Anne had sug-

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gested looked most inviting, followed it, staring straight ahead of her as she walked, and scarcely conscious of the spring freshness about her. Far in the distance was a misty line of hills, perhaps mountains, and nearer at hand rose the hill of which Ellis had spoken yesterday. Maybe it would be fun to climb it some day, she thought, beginning to feel that in this place one must grasp even small possibilities of pleasure.

It seemed to her that she must have walked more than a mile when she came to the lake which gleamed like a sapphire in the afternoon sunshine. On one side were the pretty houses of which Anne had spoken. Most of them looked as if still buried in their winter sleep, but one of them, the nearest to this end of the lake, older and less pretentious than many of the others, showed signs of life. While she stood there a man came out of the house with what looked like a steamer-chair filled with wraps.

Not liking to stare even at this distance, Rose turned her attention to deciding which road of the two that were before her she should take. One lay along the edge of the lake where there was a strip of white beach and what she supposed must be a bath-house. The other, an offshoot from the main road, mounted to a pine-clad height which looked down on the lake.

“I’ll go up there and sit for a while where I can

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see the water," Rose decided, and walked quickly up the narrow road to the top, and then across a tree-covered space carpeted with pine-needles. At the very edge of the cliff she sat down, and looking over, found herself directly above the other road, which widened considerably just here. Not far from her she noticed a steep path, worn by venture-some feet that scorned the flight of steps which some little distance away led to the beach.

Except for the ripple of water on the sand it was very still here. Too still, Rose thought, and after a little while of gazing listlessly at the dazzling water and the tree-shaded shores she was quite ready to turn homewards. She was just about to get up when the sound of voices on the beach below made her peer over the edge. There she saw a man wheeling—it wasn't a steamer-chair, after all, that she had seen at the house nearest the lake, but a wheel-chair, and in it was a boy. At least Rose thought it was a boy and guessed that he might be about Ellis' age. He must be an invalid, she supposed, but his voice sounded cheerful.

"There we are, Hegan," he was saying as the man wheeled the chair into the spot to which its occupant was pointing. "Here, my feet will be in the sunshine and my head out of it. Now if you'll trot back to the house and get that book I forgot to bring I shall be much obliged."

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Rose smiled in spite of herself at the word "trot" in connection with the amiable-looking giant standing by the chair.

"You might just open that umbrella before you go and leave it where I can grab it in case the light shifts into my eyes," the boy went on. "And, Hegan, I'm not in a hurry for the book, and if Miss Ellen wants you for anything, you do it before you come back."

"All right, Mr. Neil." Hegan was bending over the boy as if he were fond of him, Rose thought, and tucking him in with exceeding care. Then he departed with long strides that in no way resembled a trot.

Left to himself, the boy on the beach adjusted to his satisfaction a board which rested on the arms of his chair and laid a book thereon. Presently he took a note-book and pencil from a hanging pocket and scribbled busily.

Suddenly conscious that she was spying, Rose drew herself back from the edge and once more made up her mind to go home. She had meant to go down the steps and take the lower road, but this she gave up. "He thinks he's alone," she said to herself, "and probably he hates to be looked at." Entirely well and strong herself she pitied, but avoided whenever she could, persons who were ill or unhappy.

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She sat there a few moments longer, then, as she rose to her feet, the sound of voices made her look down at the beach again to see three small, ragged-looking boys, one in advance and the others lagging behind him.

“Hi, boys, c’mon! Here’s de guy all alone. I tol’ yer I seen de big feller goin’ off.” Then, to Rose’s horror, she saw a stone fly from the leader’s hand straight at the boy in the chair.

She hesitated just for the second she needed to decide between the steps and the path; if she took the latter she would be a little behind them and they might not see her so soon. As she started down, half-running, half-sliding, she saw that the boy in the chair had seized the open umbrella and was holding it shield-wise over his head.

To Rose’s delight she was almost upon the small boys before they realized her coming, and she managed a back-handed slap at one of them while she was pouncing upon the leader, who was too much absorbed to be aware of anything else. When he felt the grip of her strong hands on his shoulders, and had twisted himself to look into her frowning face, he squeaked shrilly to his followers:

“Hi, fellers! Let her have it; it’s only a girl.”

“You would, would you?” snapped Rose, thrusting him between herself and the other boys who promptly dropped their weapons and fled. Then

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she gave him a shake that she was ashamed of afterwards because he seemed so pitifully thin and small. "What do you mean by throwing stones at someone who can't chase you?" she demanded sternly. "What ——"

"Bring him over here, will you, please," a clear voice interrupted, and for a moment Rose nearly lost her grip on her prisoner who, in a spasm of fright, wriggled successfully out from one of her hands, but just missed going free.

"I ain't a-goin' over dere," he whimpered. "He—he'll give me to de big feller."

"Well, you deserve it," Rose answered as she pushed the struggling boy ahead of her. "Brace up and don't be a baby. If you're big enough to throw stones, you're big enough to take what's coming to you."

But the youngster whimpered and twisted until Rose had him within clutching distance of the older boy. Then he shrank against her, and she could feel his body tremble and hear an occasional shuddering breath. With his thin face and beady black eyes he seemed like a small trapped animal, and she began to feel sorry for him.

"What did you do it for, Johnny?" questioned the older boy, smiling in spite of an effort to look stern. "You needn't bother to tell me; I know. You're one of the boys that played the mischief in

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our garden the other day. And what did the big man tell you he'd do if he caught you at anything else?"

"E-e-eat me," wailed the boy, ducking and twisting almost out of Rose's grasp. His terror was so extreme that she was tempted to let him go, but her faith in the kindness of the other boy made her take a fresh grasp instead. "I won't let anyone eat you," she promised, giving him a shake less forcible and more friendly than the one which had preceded it.

"He isn't a pleasant object to hold, is he?" said the boy in the chair with an appreciative grin. "See here, old chap, if we let you off now will you promise not to throw stones again? No, don't promise," he added before the boy had time even to nod, "that'll only get you in worse, perhaps. Hold on a second while I think." He stared solemnly at the urchin, whose eyes were beginning to lose some of their terror, then fumbled in his pocket.

"My name's Neil Ramsay. What's yours, young 'un?"

"Pete. Pete Silva," muttered the boy.

"You and those other boys live over in Mill Hollow, and you're the boss of the gang, aren't you?"

Pete nodded, and there was a gleam of satisfaction in his wary glance.



"HE ISN'T A PLEASANT OBJECT TO HOLD, IS HE?"

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Neil Ramsay pulled his hand out of his pocket. "Look here, Pete, what's this?" he asked unexpectedly.

"A—a nickel." The boy's eyes gloated on the coin.

"Want it?"

"Uh-huh." His glance was hungry for it, but he was cautious to the point of indifference.

"If I give you this will you come to my house and see me next Saturday afternoon?"

"Will—will de big feller be wit' yer?"

"Maybe. But if he is he won't hurt you. Buck up, man. Don't let us think you're afraid. I can't believe you're the boss of that gang."

The boy swallowed with difficulty. "I—I'll come," he said hoarsely.

"Listen, here's a bargain." Neil Ramsay was smiling now, and the boy, by this time free from Rose's grasp, went, in spite of himself, a step nearer. "If you'll show me this nickel on Saturday I'll give you another one to go with it. Do you think you can keep from spending it until then?"

"I—I dunno."

"I'm thinking of having some ice-cream on Saturday," the boy in the chair remarked casually to Rose. "Perhaps some candy. Kind of a party, you know."

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"Can't I come if I don't keep the fi' cents?" demanded Pete.

"Yes, come anyway. But I'd just like to see if you're smart enough to keep it. Some boys wouldn't be. Here! Take it. It's yours. If you bring it next Saturday I shall think you're worth knowing."

Pete took it half-doubtfully. "Kin I—kin I bring Reddy to de show?" he asked after a moment's reflection.

The boy in the chair regarded him questioningly. "Do you believe Reddy would be a good fellow at a party—not bring any stones with him—wash his hands and all that sort of thing, you know?"

"He's gotta do right if I say so," answered Pete, his black eyes snapping. "He's gotta clean hisself."

"Then go to it; it'll take you a week," murmured Neil, and added quickly, "Scoot along now, and don't forget to come to my party and bring your nickel."

"And—and Reddy." Pete was off without a backward glance.

"There! Ellen and I have been wanting to get hold of the leader of that gang and I believe this is the one," Neil Ramsay said, settling back in his chair wearily.

Rose laughed. "He thinks so anyway. I can

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fancy him making Reddy 'clean hisself.' I gave a good slap to someone. I wonder if that was Reddy."

"I have to thank you for coming to the rescue," the boy said gratefully. "The umbrella wouldn't have lasted long. My sister will fall on your neck with gratitude. Ellen and I live in the old brown house back there. Are you staying in Brookfield?"

"I'm Rose Sheldon. We've just come here for the summer," Rose explained hastily. "We live ——"

"You needn't tell me where you live," Neil Ramsay interrupted. "We've known Aunt Serena Merrill ever since we can remember, and Ellen has been watching for your family. I wish she could have seen you scrambling down that steep path."

"I must have been a sight."

"You were," grinned the boy, and then his face grew sober. "If you'd ever been stuck in a chair and couldn't move you'd know how fine a sight you looked to me."

The color deepened in Rose's cheeks and for an embarrassed moment she wondered if she ought to say something sympathetic, and searched her mind for the right thing. Not finding it, she murmured hastily, "I must go. Anne will be sure I'm lost."

"Is Anne your sister?"

"Yes. There are six of us. Ellis first—almost

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eighteen; Anne will be seventeen in October; I'm pretty nearly fifteen, and Connie is twelve. Susan and Jimsey are six and eight." Rose ended abruptly, realizing that if any of the others had talked so freely about the family to a perfect stranger she would probably have found fault with the offender.

"It must be jolly with so many of you. Ellen and I have just each other," Neil Ramsay said wistfully. Then his face brightened. "We're a mighty good team, all the same, even if it is a small one, and it's team work that counts. I bet you've played enough hockey and basket-ball to know that."

"Of course I do. And I like out-of-door games better than anything else. Aren't they exciting?" And then Rose had another moment of discomfort because she had talked of sports to this boy who was so obviously out of them.

"They're great," Neil answered briefly. "Oh, I say, then, you're the very one Ellen and I want to help us on our latest plans. Will you?"

"How can I tell until I know what they are?" laughed Rose.

"Well, for one thing, we want to get hold of these Mill Hollow boys—have a club or something of that kind. We shall need someone to teach them outdoor games, and how to play fair, and—and to be good sports when they don't win. That's about

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the hardest thing—to keep on fighting when you're on the losing side.” Just for an instant the boyish face grew sober, and the young eyes held a bitter knowledge, but the next moment he was smiling again. “Will you help us now you know about it?” he persisted coaxingly.

“I never could teach anyone anything,” Rose demurred. “My patience is about a minute long.”

“Nonsense! Yes, you can too. Just wait a little and you'll find yourself Director of Athletics. Ellen is great on ‘eats,’ and that counts for a lot with boys, but she isn't strong on games.”

“I'm sure Ellis will teach for you, and Anne will love to help feed them,” murmured Rose. “And Connie ——”

“Seems to me you're very generous about offering everyone except yourself,” interrupted Neil with a grin. “Well, of course, no one's going to oblige you to do anything, but I hoped you would. Somehow I got the idea when I saw you plunging down the hill that if you once started anything you'd put it through.”

“Now you're making fun of me, and just to punish you I shan't promise anything. Oh, there's your man—I must go. You'll be all right now even if those little imps should come back.”

“Oh, I say, have you been waiting for that? It was dandy of you. I shall tell Ellen all about my

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thrilling rescue, and she'll be over to see you very soon. She's nicer than her brother; she doesn't tease."

Rose laughed and said good-bye hastily. As she went along the homeward road she looked with eager curiosity at the house where Neil and his sister lived. It was certainly not so new as the others, and she had to confess that it looked shabby, but now there was something interesting about it. She wondered what Ellen looked like and how old she was. "Probably she's his grown-up sister and takes care of him," she decided.

As she went into the house she could hear the family talking in the living-room, and Connie seemed to be holding the floor.

"Miss Eunice Dean's got the homeiest house," Connie was saying, "and right in one corner of it is the dearest little shop for her sister, Miss Emeline. And she's so thin and white you'd think she'd blow away, the sister, I mean, not Miss Eunice, but she's awfully cheerful. She's got the cutest things to sell, and she said I might come and help her some day. And ——" she stopped abruptly, for Rose came into the room at that moment, and Connie was not at all sure that this budget of town news would appeal to her older sister.

"Connie's been taking a neighborly walk," Anne said with a chuckle, guessing what Connie might be

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thinking. "I suppose she's afraid you might not be interested in hearing that she's made a new acquaintance."

"Oh, I don't mind," Rose answered with surprising cheerfulness, and then paused an instant before launching a bomb at her unsuspecting family. "If she can go me any better I'd like to hear about it. I"—her brown eyes sparkled, and for the moment she was the nicest Rose they knew—"I've slapped one little boy, shaken another, talked with a big boy, and been invited to help run a club. So there!"

CHAPTER VI

A MORNING CALL

"ANY for me? Oh, Ellis, have you got one for me?" Rose hurried down the path to meet her brother, who was just returning from the post-office. "If someone hasn't written from Melford by this time I shall be too disappointed for words."

"You've only been here a week," said her brother. "You can't expect your friends to write the minute you get away." And then because his sister's face grew sober, he relented and drew a fat letter from his pocket. "Here's one from your—beloved—chum," he drawled, holding it out of her reach, and scrutinizing the envelope. "Such hen-tracks! It looks to me like Miss Bou Sheltoy. That postmaster is some little wizard to know enough to put that in our box. Now ——"

"Oh, fiddle!" Rose, with an agile leap, captured the letter. "Didn't I get anything else?"

"You grasping thing! No! There are some for Father, and one for me from a hotel in New York. Wait a minute and I'll open it." Ellis put

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down his parcels with exasperating slowness, and Rose, hugging her precious letter, waited.

“To think I didn’t know that writing! It’s from Archibald Bradley, Junior, if you please. Well, what do you think—they landed two weeks ago and this is the first chance he’s found to write. Great plans brewing, but he can’t tell me about them just yet. ‘Excuse short letter’ (same old gag) ‘but will tell you all about the *Alice Bell* and our voyage when we meet.’ He’s kept putting off telling us about that voyage ever since they started. Archie is a poor letter-writer. Oh, in the post-script he says Roger had a letter from Anne telling them about our summer plans. That’s good. Now I shan’t have to explain things when I write.” Ellis ended with a sigh of heartfelt gratitude.

“Huh! You’re just the same kind of a little letter-writer Archie is,” murmured Rose, who was already tearing open her own letter and now dropped into a porch chair to enjoy it. It was not long after breakfast, the dishes, thank goodness, were done; as soon as she read this she must go upstairs and find out what Anne was doing. She remembered with blissful relief that Effie was coming this afternoon, and scarcely heard Ellis, who was shouting to Anne the latest news about Archie Bradley.

Half an hour later, having read and meditated

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and reread, she slowly went up-stairs, with her mind full of Melford good times, to find Anne, flushed and tired, trying to coax a big chair through the doorway of her own room.

“I’m going to put this rocking-chair into Effie’s chamber,” explained Anne. “She needs something comfy when she’s on her feet so much.”

“What makes you try to do it all before she gets here?” grumbled Rose, taking the chair from her sister’s unresisting grasp and pulling it along the hall to the doorway of the room allotted to Effie. “When she’s doing the work you’ll have a lot more time.”

“I know it. I’ve really given up most of the things I wanted—like sash-curtains and—and ——”

“Fiddlesticks! Effie won’t expect those things,” Rose interrupted. “Besides, she’ll be here this afternoon and there isn’t time.”

“There’d be time enough if I had someone to help me,” Anne persisted. “Except Daddy, Effie’s the one who does most for us, and I should like to make her room seem cosy. I’m positive there are things in that storeroom that would help out, but I haven’t had time to explore.”

Rose shrugged. “I’m crazy to wash my hair this morning,” she muttered; “it’s a gorgeous day for drying it. It seems to me I’ve had to work nearly every minute since I’ve been here.”

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Anne looked at her queerly, drew in her breath as if she were about to say something and then forebore to say it. "I suppose it does seem like that," she murmured at last. "I feel so, too, but I don't see my way to stopping just yet. And it helps so much when we all work together."

She went toward her own room as she finished speaking, leaving her sister frowning and irresolute. For some reason Anne's last remark had brought to Rose's mind a vivid picture of her friendly acquaintance in the wheel-chair, and the eager way in which he had said, "It's team-work that counts." It had never occurred to her before to apply the idea of the team-spirit to home life, but she was obliged grudgingly to admit that it fitted there as well as in games.

"Say, Nan," she called, hurrying after her sister, "I'll go into the storeroom and see what I can find if you'll let me do it my way and not bother to ask you about everything."

"Of course," answered Anne. "I was just going to see if there might be some stuff for curtains in one of the trunks, but I'd much rather you'd do it. And I won't interfere the least little bit—I like your taste, you know."

Rose made her a low bow. "Now you're flattering me so that I'll do things for you," she said more cheerfully than she had spoken before. "Will you

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promise that if I make that room look prettier you won't ask me to wash any more dishes for you to-day?"

"Not a dish," Anne responded, sternly repressing a very human desire to inform her sister that it was not for her—Anne—that she would be working, but for the family, and that it was almost as much Rose's place as her own to —— "Oh, what's the use?" Anne admonished herself sharply as she went back to finish her bed-making. This summer must go smoothly for Father, she was thinking, as she patted and pulled and smoothed. She must not let it make the slightest difference to her whether Rose did things as a favor, or because it was her place to do them.

She stopped work for a few moments to gaze out of the window at the garden, where Father and Ellis were busily working, with the younger children trying to help. It thrilled her to realize that this was her garden, and this room was a part of her own house. She felt that she should never want to sell it—that even the prospect of college could not reconcile her to giving up all this. "Silly! I don't have to decide about that this morning," she said, going back to her work with eyes still a little dreamy. In spite of herself her mind ran on in wonderful imaginings; perhaps she should live here summer after summer; perhaps—her breath came

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more quickly for a moment—perhaps she should write stories here some time. Even after she had gone down-stairs to dust the living-room, she let herself plan beautiful things that might happen; it made housework easier when she decorated it with the pleasant pictures of her mind.

In the meantime Rose, having stopped to slip on her oldest blouse and skirt, and tie an enveloping scarf about her head, had plunged into the mysteries of trunks and boxes. This part of it would be fun, she conceded, if it were not keeping her in the house on such a glorious day. She tried to fix her attention on certain material for Effie's windows, but her mind would wander in spite of her efforts. Old dresses—sometime she must try them on and do her hair high and surprise the family; some dimity—white with yellow rosebuds—why not dress up her own room?—this would make lovely covers for toilet-table and bureau, and a yellow room would be cheerful at least. But there wasn't any toilet-table in her room and the paper was horrid. Rose pushed some floating locks of hair out of her eyes with the back of her hand, and gazed about the storeroom. Tucked into a corner she could see something that looked like a toilet-table, and with the precious dimity in her hand she started across the room.

“A mirror and a long drawer, and two dinky

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drawers on each side! What luck!" she said almost unbelievably. "I don't suppose Anne will care to use it—anyway, I want it most—most awfully." She added the last two words hastily, in deference to a sudden vision of the great-aunt her father's note had mentioned. "Anyway, you have to know what you want and go for it. No one else will do it," she murmured, as she pulled the table out from under the eaves and began measuring the length of it with the dimity. "I wonder if there's a place for it in my room."

Carefully keeping the measure of length she started for her own room, scarcely noticing as she went through the hall that Anne was talking to someone at the front door. Exultantly she found that there was a corner which seemed to be crying out for the toilet-table. "It ought to have a glass top," she mused, standing in front of it; "perhaps I can manage it in some way. I could make a bed-spread out of the dimity. But this awful paper! It would be pretty to have a white ground with yellow flowers on it." Rose's eyes kindled with the vision of the room as she could make it if she had money. "Perhaps Daddy could think up a way. He likes to plan rooms. I wonder if there's anything more in the storeroom that would make it look pretty."

On the way back to the treasure-house Rose

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stopped just long enough to realize that Anne was saying good-bye to one caller and welcoming another.

“Goodness! Do they have morning receptions here?” she said to herself with anxiety. “Anyway, Anne knows enough not to call me.” For the next half-hour, deep in her investigations, she forgot there were such things as too-friendly neighbors who would call whether one wanted them or not. Then a discovery which seemed a little more wonderful than the rest sent her flying down-stairs, talking as she went.

“Oh, Nan! Nan! I’ve found some gorgeous things to make my room pretty—a dinky toilet-table, some hanging book-shelves, an old-fashioned rug, just the right colors, and—why, where are you, Nancy?”

She poked her head into the living-room only to find it empty. “Nan! Nan! Where are you?” she repeated impatiently, and then Anne, with a note of warning in her voice which Rose was too absorbed to perceive, called from the front porch.

“Well, you’re certainly taking it easy while I’m working hard,” Rose said, stepping from the shadowy hall into the bright sunshine. The next instant she gave a gasp of dismay, for in the path the boy in the wheel-chair sat amusedly smiling at her, and on the steps near him were Anne and some-

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one else—a small, exquisitely-neat, brown-haired girl, who sprang up eagerly to meet the newcomer. Immediately Rose was conscious that her face and hands were dirty, her hair flying, and her dress not fit to be seen.

“I was just coming to tell you that Miss Ramsay and her brother ——” began Anne, but her sister had turned to flee.

“Back in five minutes,” she called as she went up the front stairs two steps at a time.

“I bet it’ll be fifteen,” Neil Ramsay flung after her, and his ringing laugh chased her up-stairs.

“You had four seconds to spare,” he said when she had reappeared, and had been properly introduced to his sister. “You’re a wonder. I didn’t know a girl could do it.”

“When Rose starts, things fly,” Anne said.

“I’ve heard they do,” put in Ellen quickly. “Oh, Rose—you and Anne won’t mind if I call you by your first names right away, will you?—Rose, I can’t thank you enough for taking care of my big brother. Those little imps might really have hurt him.”

“Some rescue,” said Neil, trying to smile, and looking so much as if he hated to be talked about that Anne abruptly changed the subject.

“I’m always so thankful when Rose takes anything off my shoulders,” she said hastily. “She’s

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sure to put it through much sooner than I could. She's been exploring this morning—trying to find things to dress up one of the rooms. Did you get much done, Rose?"

They were all gazing at her interestedly as if they expected to hear what treasures she had unearthed, and for the first time Rose realized clearly that she had spent her time so far in planning and seeking decorations for her own room. Then it occurred to her that she must make some answer to Anne's question. "N-not much," she faltered, and without knowing it turned on her sister a look so appealing that Anne wondered what had happened and stared blankly in return.

"It's fun dressing up an old house, isn't it?" Ellen said quickly. "Neil and I were both born in our house on the lake, but we haven't been here for the summer for four years. Not since I was eleven, and now I'm housekeeper." She tipped her smooth brown head on one side and looked at her brother with laughing eyes. "Go on," she urged. "When I say I'm housekeeper I always expect to hear some unflattering remark."

"You—housekeeper!" growled Neil, but he looked at her with such evident pride that his words sounded like a compliment. "You just wait till Cousin Jean gets here; she'll show you."

"I hope she will; you're too much for me to

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manage," Ellen responded serenely, and turned to the girls again. "We've just had a letter from our cousin, Jean Graham. She's coming to spend the summer with us, and we're too happy for words."

She was looking at Rose, but it was Anne who answered with a squeal of ecstasy. "There can't be two Jean Grahams! Is she tall and graceful and beautiful, with brown hair that has shining lights in it, and a lovely smile, and—and eyes that make you trust her right away?"

"Whew! Some poetry! I guess it hits Cousin Jean right enough, though," Neil answered with surprise in his voice. "I never noticed the shining lights you mention, but I know she's got good serviceable features, and—and she's an all-round good sport. She can swim, row and skate; and she rides like a breeze." He ended with an unconscious sigh, as if his memories of his cousin were bound up with pleasures like these.

"And—and does she write?" Anne persisted, not daring to believe anything so delightful as this until the last link was tested. "I don't mean letters—I mean real writing—stories and ——"

"Indeed she does," answered Ellen. "Stories and newspaper articles, and special articles for the magazines. One of the things she's going to do this summer is a series of papers on New England

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architecture, and she'll get some of her material in the towns near here."

"She's the one then, of course," Anne rejoiced. "You see, we made our plans in such a hurry that I haven't had a chance to let her know about it. But she's my dearest and most wonderful friend, and to think of having her here for all summer——" She stopped, partly for lack of words to express herself, and partly because at that moment she happened to glance at her sister.

"You're so thrilly, Anne," Rose said with a hint of scorn in her voice, and then, because she caught a look of surprise in Ellen's eyes, "the rest of us don't really know Miss Graham—we've seen her only once. She'd probably be surprised to know she's Nan's dearest and most wonderful friend."

"I think she suspects it," Anne laughed, "and there's nothing to keep me from liking her as much as I please as long as I don't bother her about it. Father'll be delighted to know what she's going to write this summer. He loves to talk about houses and gardens."

"Oh, do you suppose he'd talk to me about my garden?" Ellen asked eagerly, and no one but Neil noticed that Rose's face was still clouded as the two other girls chatted on about seed-planting and flowers.

"I'd call Father and Ellis," Anne said pres-

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ently, "but they've been digging all the morning, and I hope Daddy's gone in to lie down by this time." She hesitated a moment and then asked a question shyly, as though she were afraid someone would make fun of her. "Ellen, would you—would you mind coming up into my room for a moment? There's something I'd like to show you."

"If there are any secrets I want to be in on 'em," Neil said promptly.

"I can guess without going. Anne can't believe that anything so delicious and delightful can possibly happen, and she wants to show Ellen Miss Graham's picture and find out if it really is the same person." Rose's face and voice were pleasant, but there was an undercurrent of feeling that puzzled the boy in the chair.

"Good guess, Posy," laughed Anne, giving her sister's hair a gentle tweak as she passed her. "I'd bring it down, Ellen, only ——"

"Only she wants a chance to talk about her dearest and most wonderful friend when I'm not around," interrupted Rose, which was an equally good guess on her part.

"Why don't you like our Cousin Jean?" Neil asked unexpectedly when the two girls were out of hearing. "We think she's a corker."

"I dare say she is. I don't really know her,"

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Rose answered with polite indifference. And then, "Have you seen anything of Pete—Pete Silva—since I last saw you?"

"Not a thing. To-morrow's the day I told him to come. Ellen and I are wondering whether it's going to be war or peace with that gang. Do you like boys?"

"Why—why, I like big ones—that I can have fun with." The abruptness of the question surprised Rose into answering with even more than her customary frankness. She was afraid he would understand that she liked best boys who were well and strong and could have good times—as, of course, she did.

"Not small dirty ones, you mean." Whatever he may have felt, Neil didn't show any signs of hurt feelings, which was an enormous relief. "Ellen and I think it will be some fun this summer trying to get hold of these youngsters. If only I weren't tied to this old chair and could teach them how to play games! Jingo! I could hold 'em in my hand that way." There was an eager longing in his voice, and his face grew sober.

To Rose, liking above all things to be well and strong, came a sick shiver of sympathy. How could she possibly say anything comforting when, to her, it seemed so dreadful to be as he was? Before she could speak, however, he had pulled him-

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self out of his despondency with a shrug and a smile.

“I’ve got to wait a while for it, but the doctors say there’s a real chance for me to come out of this all right,” he went on quickly, “and I’m banking on it. You can just believe I’m not going to be in a wheel-chair all my life. No, sir!”

“Of course not,” Rose agreed, and began then and there dimly to realize that a spirit like this was bigger and more wonderful than strength of body.

“I have to keep busy while I’m tied, and the best thing I know is helping other people to get untied,” Neil continued, and then, at her look of mystification, laughed—that infectious chuckle of his which made her smile in spite of herself. “I suppose you’ll think I’m batty if I say there are lots of ways of being tied besides my way.”

Rose, not being used to boys who talked like this, looked at him blankly. “I hadn’t thought you were batty,” she began doubtfully, “but maybe I ——”

“Maybe you will if I keep on,” laughed Neil, taking the words out of her mouth. “Good! I like someone who comes back at me. But, anyway, what I said is true. Take those kids in Mill Hollow, for instance: they’re tied because they haven’t enough to eat and wear, and because the little teaching they get at home is worse than none.

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Some persons are tied because they can't think of anything except themselves and what they want; and others because they are afraid to do anything the rich and stylish don't do."

"Whatever made you think of all that?" Rose put in bluntly. "You sound as old as the hills, but you don't look so."

"I shall be eighteen this summer," Neil answered, and then, "Probably I shouldn't have thought of 'all that,' as you call it, if I hadn't talked with Miss Eunice so much. We've had great old arguments. Anyway, when a fellow has to go 'round in a little private carriage he has loads of chances to think things out."

"I should say so." Rose tried to keep from seeming to pity him. If she were in his place she was sure she couldn't bear to have people make a fuss over her. She wished with all her heart that the other girls would come back and that they could talk about something else. And then, without in the least wanting to or meaning to, she asked almost crossly, "Do you—do you think everyone is tied in some way? How about me?"

"Why, I suppose almost everyone is in one way or another." Neil was staring across a green stretch of meadow and his eyes grew thoughtful. Then his gaze came back to Rose's half-frowning face, and he smiled, a mischievous boyish grin which

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made him look younger than he really was. "I'm no mind-reader," he said quickly. "I don't know you well enough to tell. Probably I couldn't judge anyway. I guess it's something you have to figure out for yourself, but, if you're like what I was before I was knocked out, you don't stop having a good time long enough to think real thoughts."

"I shall have time enough now," Rose answered with some bitterness, "to think bucketfuls of real thoughts. There won't be any fun in this place to keep me from it."

"Don't be too sure. Little old Brookfield sometimes hands out a good time when you least expect it. Ellen and I are counting on all sorts of larks. And we shall depend on you and your family to help us with our Mill Hollow Club which we're bound to have. You can do no end of things for us if you only will."

"Well—perhaps—but you won't find me much good." It sounded weak and half-hearted, and Rose knew it. She was fiercely ashamed of herself without knowing just why. She wished other persons wouldn't seem so good and cheerful and encouraging when under the circumstances they had a perfect right to feel unhappy. She wished—and then she realized that Neil was gazing at her with his whimsical smile.

"Buck up! The worst is yet to come," he said

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solemnly. "The girls are coming back and if they see you looking like that they'll think I've been sticking pins in you."

"You have," Rose averred, "big, sharp ones. Aren't you ashamed to treat ——"

"What's Neil been doing now?" demanded Ellen, coming out on the porch. "I never leave him that he doesn't get into some mischief." She went down the steps and stood beside her brother. Anne, watching, saw a mothering look in the girl's lovely eyes, and felt sure that Ellen would be a friend worth winning.

"I haven't done a thing, upon my word," asserted Neil, with his most innocent, small-boy expression. "Say, Ellen, there comes Hegan—we must go. Have you ——?"

"No, I haven't, but I will now," interrupted his sister. "We're going to have the use of Miss Dean's automobile this afternoon, and we'd like to have you go with us, Anne and Rose."

"Lovely! I'm wild about motoring and I never get enough." Rose turned to her sister with entreaty. "Do say yes, Nan; I want to go so much."

"Shall we surely be home in time to get supper?" Anne asked. "I'd love to go, but you see until Effie comes I'm chief cook. And Daddy and Ellis are so hungry after garden work I should hate to keep them waiting."

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"Surely we'll get home in good season," promised Neil. "We eat, too. It'll be fine and dandy to show you both some of the beauty spots. We'll call for you at two o'clock if that won't be too early."

Anne flew to the kitchen as soon as the new friends had said farewell, but Rose went slowly upstairs. For her a glamor had come over the morning; perhaps, after all, she should have some good times in Brookfield. Ellen was certainly sweet and she wasn't the namby-pamby kind either. She liked Neil, too. He was different from any boy she had ever known, but he had a lot of fun in him even though he did talk in unexpected ways about doing things for others. How queer that they should be cousins to Anne's Miss Graham. "I don't care; I'm not going to let her spoil my summer," she said to herself defiantly, and then walked over to the mirror to see if the dress she was wearing looked fresh enough for afternoon.

"My hair looks rather mussy," she decided. "And I must hunt up a fresh collar and cuffs. I don't like myself in this dress very well. I'd wear my blue skirt if I could only get that awful spot out of it." She glanced at the clock; there would be time to try, anyway. A moment later she was busily at work.

CHAPTER VII

THE OBTRUSIVE TOILET-TABLE

SOMETIME afterwards, when Susan shouted that "dinner was just putting on the table," Rose was still impatiently scrubbing away at the remains of the spot which at the present stage did not look altogether promising.

"I think this time it will dry out all right," she said to Connie, who had strolled into the room. "And if it doesn't I'm not going to let a little thing like a spot worry me. You don't see any gray hairs yet, do you?"

For the moment she was her own gay, care-free self again, and Connie looked at her approvingly. She was always trying to get it straight in her mind whether she was fonder of Anne and prouder of Rose or just the other way about. Usually she ended by deciding that she was both prouder and fonder of Anne, but, after all, there was something about Rose —

"I hadn't a snip of an idea I'd taken so long about it," Rose said, looking a little dazed at the flight of time. "Why, I must have been an hour."

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"I supposed you'd been helping Anne get dinner," Connie remarked disturbingly, as they went down-stairs together.

"What's the matter with your helping?" Rose demanded. "You always seem to be able to think up things for others to do."

"I've been working in the garden ever since breakfast." Connie's air of conscious virtue was distinctly irritating.

Rose's manner held a remnant of the irritation as she walked into the dining-room. Somehow it seemed to her Anne's own fault that there had been no one to help her. "Why are we having dinner earlier, and why didn't you call me?" she asked in an aggrieved tone as Anne set the last dish on the table.

"Well, if I'm going to be ready at two I had to have it early. And it's an awful bother to chase 'round the house and perhaps not find anyone willing to do anything." Anne was warm and tired, and her voice was a little plaintive. "There'll be the dishes to wash, though, and you can help me hustle those. Oh, I forgot; you weren't to be asked to wash any more dishes to-day, were you? I'm wild to see what you've been doing; does it look pretty?"

Rose stared at her blankly. "N-not much change yet," she stammered, almost choking in her

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sudden realization that she had completely forgotten what she had agreed to do in Effie's room. It flashed into her mind that she had frequently said to the others, "A promise is a promise, you know," and had held them strictly thereto. But this seemed to her a different thing, and, now that they had promised to go with Ellen and Neil, Anne surely wouldn't expect her to keep to the earlier agreement. Anyway good old Effie would be so glad to get back to the family she wouldn't mind about furnishings. Rose tried to ignore the troublesome thoughts which crowded into her mind, and to listen to what Father was saying about gardens.

"Ellis and I were going to drive over to Mr. Moody's farm," he went on, "but I believe we won't go until to-morrow if you and Rose are to be away this afternoon, Nan. I'm glad you are getting acquainted with those young people. I hear fine things about them from Miss Dean."

Rose's unruly mind jumped at this. That settled it. Father wanted them to go, so, of course, she couldn't back out. Perhaps she'd have time to slide a few things into the room while Anne was washing dishes and getting dressed.

"Excuse me, please," she was saying the next moment, without waiting for her dessert or even to finish the first part of her dinner. She hurried upstairs, slipped into her working-dress, and then took

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a comprehensive survey of Effie's room. There was a bed, not made; an old-fashioned bureau on one side of the room, and a stand with bowl and pitcher on the other; the rocker Anne had provided was the only chair. There were shades, but no curtains at the windows, and the bare floor was painted an unattractive yellow-brown.

"Rugs!" said Rose aloud, "and a table and more chairs." She ran back to the storeroom, deciding as she went that she would not give that darling toilet-table to Effie, because she never should have the face to ask it back again. In the bottom of her mind as she looked about her was a picture not of Effie's room, but of her own as she might make it, and she spent more time than she meant to use in choosing rugs, because she wanted to be sure to save out those that would suit her plans. At last she found some braided ones in shades of brown and yellow with touches of black, and when she had spread three of these on the floor, Effie's room at once took on a homelike air.

"It looks so big. I've simply got to have a table and, at least, two more chairs," she said to herself, and by now the picture of what this room might become was crowding everything else out of her mind. "I wish I could find something for sash-curtains; there are rods all ready for them."

As she hurried back to the storeroom again she

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could hear Anne coming up-stairs, and she wondered if it could be possible that the dishes were done, and her sister ready to change her dress.

Such a collection of crippled furniture! And yet, even her slight knowledge made Rose realize that it was good furniture which might be repaired. There were chairs that needed to be re-seated; a chair with a broken leg carefully tied on; one with a broken back. After what seemed to her an unending search Rose found two that would do and set them in the doorway. Now for a table! There was a large one which would not suit at all; a very small one, scarcely big enough for any use. What she wanted was a table of moderate size with a drawer. As if responding to roll-call, the cherished toilet-table poked an obtrusive corner into her as she went across the room.

“Ouch! That hurt! You act as if you’d like to get out of here, but I want you somewhere else.” At sight of herself in the mirror she involuntarily put up her hand to brush back her hair, thereby adding another streak to those already on her face. “It’ll take me ages to get ready; I wonder what time it is, anyway.”

At that instant an automobile horn tooted, and she heard Anne calling. “Rose! Rose! They’ve come. They’re a few minutes early, but I’m ready. Why, where are you?”

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"Storeroom," snapped Rose, and as Anne appeared in the doorway, "I'm not going. I can't get that old room you're so fussy about fixed right, but you needn't tell 'em that."

"I thought you finished it this morning. Why didn't you let it go with what you did then? I shouldn't have made any fuss. And how am I going to explain it to Ellen and Neil?"

"Explain—nothing." Rose's voice was as cross as if Anne were responsible for all her troubles. "Just say I'm sorry"—she swallowed hard—"I'm sorry I can't go, but it's impossible." She dropped down on the heap of rugs, and sat there hugging her knees.

Anne's blue eyes grew troubled. She was tired, she had been anticipating the pleasure ahead of her with real delight, and at least a part of her fun would be spoiled if she left Rose at home feeling like this. "Probably they wouldn't mind waiting a little, and you're so quick about getting ready ——" she began with wistful eagerness.

"Nothing doing," interrupted Rose; "you got me into this. I'm doing it for you and I'm going to put it through."

Anne took three steps away from her, then turned. "You make me tired," she said as if freeing a long pent-up impulse. "You talk all the time about doing things for me, and I can't see why

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it isn't just as much your place to do part of the housework as it is mine. I wish you'd play fair." Her eyes sparkled with indignation, and a faint color rose in her cheeks; she looked as if she were about to say more, but, instead, she wheeled about and left the room. A moment later Rose heard the front door shut.

"She must have banged it—a little, anyway—or I shouldn't have heard it," was her comment. Somehow it cleared the situation extraordinarily for Anne, the peaceful and polite one of the family, to be angry. Rose hugged her knees more tightly and considered the question for a moment. She had always thought it rather a specialty of hers to be a good sport and play fair, and it annoyed her to be accused of the opposite. And yet, with her usual honesty, she admitted there might be some truth in it. Anyway, Anne would probably be sorry for what she had said and take it all back when she came home.

"Well, I shan't get anywhere by sitting here and thinking about it," she concluded after a while, jumping up and surveying the disorderly store-room with a questioning glance. "What was I doing, anyway, when Nan went for me? Oh, I know, hunting for a table."

She resumed her search, resolutely turning her back on the importunate toilet-table which so

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evidently yearned to be moved to a place more fit.

“Nan couldn’t understand why I’d taken so much time over this,” she meditated, as she bumped her head under the eaves only to find that the table she had spied there was deceptively propping a legless corner against the wall. “Of course she didn’t suspect that I hardly thought of Effie until after dinner. Didn’t Neil say that some persons are tied to thinking about themselves and what they want? That’s where he hit little me all right.” Her mind wrestled with this subject while she pursued her unavailing quest. After all, if you wanted things at all your way, you just had to think about yourself. Everyone did, and you couldn’t expect —

A slight noise made her turn to see Susan coming into the room, looking as though her world were going very wrong.

“Well, what’s the matter with you?” Rose demanded. “You look like a thunder-cloud.”

“They took Connie off in the auto. There isn’t anyone to play with me.”

“Where’s Jimsey?”

“He went with—with the man that works here. They’re going to bring back Effie and darling Rex. You knew ’bout that.”

“With Ezra, you mean. I remember now.

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They won't be back for some time. Why don't you help Daddy and Ellis?"

"Why don't you? You ain't doing anything but—but make a clutter here."

"I'm hunting for a table for Effie's room," Rose answered sharply. "And I can do it better if you'll go down-stairs."

"Why, I'll help you." Susan's deep gloom lifted a little. She looked around her with bright, darting glances. "Why, here's a table—a darling one with little drawers. Effie'll love it. I'll help you lift it." She was dragging at the beloved toilet-table before she had finished speaking.

"Susan! You let that alone and go away from here!" Rose removed her young sister with ungentle hands, lifting her and setting her down forcibly.

"O—oh! I think this is a dreadful place. I want to go back to Melford," wailed Susan, casting herself down on the floor. "Not any little girls and boys here—it's all dark at night, too—and—and hens run at you."

"Susan Sheldon, don't be a baby! Get up; your dress will be covered with dust." To be set upon her feet with a jerk did not please Susan and, though she stopped crying, she glared at her sister.

"You made my arm hurt. Some day you'll be sorry for that, Rose Sheldon. I'm going to find

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Daddy." Susan went half-way to the door, then turned. "I guess you'd miss me 'fi should run away," she said sulkily.

"Don't run—walk. Going to take a trunk with you?" Rose was diving under the eaves again, but her words came back teasingly and stirred Susan to naughtiness. She lingered a moment, irresolute, then slid bumpily down the front stairs.

Emerging from another unsuccessful search, Rose decided that, after all, a table wouldn't be necessary, and she took the two chairs she had selected into Effie's room. Then she washed her hands and made the bed. She found the sheets and pillow-cases in the bottom drawer of the bureau, and she prided herself on remembering ever since morning that Nan had told her they were there. When she went back to shut the drawer it stuck, and in jerking it she loosened what she had supposed the bottom of the bureau, but which proved to be a shallow drawer.

What luck! Here were sash-curtains—all clean and ready! Of course Nan had not discovered this drawer and she would be surprised. Curtains certainly did give a homelike air, she conceded, when she had run them on the rods and adjusted the fullness with great care. Now the room did not look so large and empty, and she was almost able to forget the space between the win-

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dows where a table of the right size would go so nicely.

"Oh, Rose! Rose!" It was Father's voice and she could hear him coming along the hall.

"Come in, Daddy." She went to meet him and ushered him into the room with a hand tucked under his arm. "Haven't I made this look a great deal better? Don't you think Effie will like it?"

"I should say she would," Mr. Sheldon answered, with the gratifying enthusiasm which so rewarded his daughters. "Was this what you stayed at home to do?" He was looking at her now with a slightly puzzled expression. "I fancied Anne was disapproving something or somebody when she told me you were not going."

Rose laughed. "She was. And 'disapproving' is a—a gentle word for what she was thinking about me. I should have felt flat as a pancake if it hadn't done me so much good to see Anne get cross for once. Oh, Daddy, I'm just horrid sometimes." There was no laughter in her eyes now, and she snuggled against her father in a way unusual for her.

"We're all horrid once in a while," he comforted, with his arm around her. "What was your special badness this time?"

Rose lifted her head. "I promised, quite early this morning, that if I could be let off from dish-

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washing, and if I could do things all my own way—you see I had to be—to be paid beforehand”—her voice reflected the scorn which in the present virtuous moment she felt for herself—“well, I said I’d make this room look homelike for Effie.”

“And you have,” said Father. “It seems to me very cosy.”

“Yes, but I’ve done all this since dinner, and most of it after Anne went away. I spent the whole morning, except when the Ramsays were here, thinking about my own room and hunting up things to make it pretty. Just taking care of myself, you see.” Rose paused and gazed at her father with some anxiety. “Daddy, do you suppose I’m going to be like that—that Aunt Harriet? I never meant to take any notice of what you wrote, but, of course, I couldn’t help it.”

Father threw back his head and laughed. “That was rather mean of me, wasn’t it? My mother used to tell us about her when we were greedy, and the way you spoke about the room reminded me of it. No, I don’t think you’ll be like her, particularly since you are warned beforehand.”

“I might have her for an example of what not to be,” Rose said soberly. “A sort of sign-post. ‘Warning! Thinking too much about oneself leads to Aunt-Harrietism!’”

“It wouldn’t be fair to remember her only by

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that," Mr. Sheldon hastened to say. "We children thought she was as brave as a lion. We used to like to hear Mother tell how she saved several children from a burning house; and when there was an epidemic in the little town where she lived she forgot herself completely. There's another sort of 'Aunt-Harrietism,' you see."

"I should say so." Rose changed suddenly in her estimation of her ancestress, and her eyes sparkled. "I like her. But, Daddy, don't you think it's loads easier to do brave things like that than to keep at all the little poky uninteresting ones?"

"Probably—for most of us. I believe intensely, though, Posy, that the little things count for just as much in the end, even if it does seem that no one takes any particular notice of the way we do them. Just the steady building up of one's house of life is the test for us all, and, Posy-chicken, the foundation stones are the most important."

"I know they are," murmured Rose. When her father talked like this she was comforted and inspired beyond measure, but she never could find words to tell him so. She was sure, however, that in some mysterious way he always knew what she was feeling.

"I take it that you don't admire particularly that girl who thought about herself all the morning and

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then had to break an engagement in order to keep a promise," her father went on unexpectedly.

"I do not," Rose answered with prompt decision. "I haven't the slightest use for her."

"Don't be too severe or I shall have to stand up for her. I must confess I like the spirit she has shown in putting this through." He glanced about the neat room approvingly. "Well, I don't see that there is anything more for me to say. You and Anne usually take the words out of my mouth and leave me no chance to discipline you. I'm such a well-meaning parent, too; it seems a pity I can't do more for my children."

"If you feel that way about it you might put me in the corner——" began Rose, but was interrupted by a clear whistle several times repeated.

"That's Ellis," Mr. Sheldon went on hurriedly. "Mr. Becker, the father of those twins who brought you a lunch, has driven over in his car and he wants to take Ellis and me to see a farm not far from here. I said I'd tell you so that you could have an eye to the house and the children."

"Children!" repeated Rose blankly. "I thought——"

"He brought the twins with him and they will play with Susan while we are gone. Posy, I think this room is a great success." His gaze took it all in once more. "Couldn't you—couldn't you find—

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but there, I don't believe anything more is necessary."

"What is it you mean, Daddy? If it's anything in the house I'll hunt for it." At the moment Rose felt that the perfecting of this room meant a great deal to her, and she awaited her father's answer with zealous interest.

"I was just thinking," he admitted, "that the space between the windows looks empty. Perhaps a table——" Ellis' whistle came again more sharply. "I must hurry, dear. Don't try to do any more. It looks well enough. Now if there's a clean spot on your face——" he gazed at her critically, planted a kiss on the top of her golden head and departed.

"That settles it," Rose said to herself, though the zeal of the moment before was fast fading. She felt herself something of a martyr as she pushed and dragged the precious toilet-table along the hall and into the space between the windows. As she rubbed it with an oily duster she found herself wishing that she had mentioned to Anne or Connie how much she wanted this particular table. It was rather hard not to have anyone appreciate her sacrifice.

"Oh, fudge!" she said crossly, and without another look at this room went back to the storeroom where reigned disorder of her own making. She

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was tired, and rather limp and forlorn, but it wouldn't be the square thing, of course, to leave a room looking like this.

A half hour later she decided with a weary sigh that it was as orderly as she could make it, and she turned toward her own room feeling that a bath and clean clothes were priceless luxuries. She looked out of her window to see what Susan and the twins were doing, but no one was in sight.

"I'll go down the minute I get dressed and take out some cookies to them," she planned. Then she started toward the bath-room to wash her face first of all. Half-way there she stopped, startled by piercing shrieks. She must find those children and tell them not to make such a noise—what could they be doing? Suddenly she realized that it was something more than noise—there was actual fright behind the cries, and she ran swiftly down-stairs.

CHAPTER VIII

“DING! DONG! BELL!”

WHEN Rose opened the back door she found herself at once in the midst of the excitement, for Billy Becker was running toward the house, his eyes wide with fright and his face very pale. Immediately after him Dilly popped into view screaming at the top of her voice.

Rose's heart stopped for a beat, then thumped madly. What had happened? Where was Susan?

Billy's look of fear lightened at sight of Rose, and he made an obvious effort to speak with no result. Then, in an anguished voice, he sang, “Ding! Dong! Bell! Susan's in the well!”

One of Dilly's wildest cries stopped in its beginning. “Billy Becker, don't you thing about thith,” she corrected; “it'th a thad time.” Then she went on screaming.

“Where's Susan?” demanded Rose, shaking her with a vigorous hand. “Stop your noise, and tell me where Susan is.”

“Down the well,” Dilly answered sulkily.

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"'Twathn't my fault. How could I tell Thuthan wath going to thtep on that board when I pulled it?"

"C-c-come," gasped Billy, catching hold of Rose's hand.

They ran a short distance, which seemed to Rose a long one, until they came to a clump of shrubbery she had not noticed before. Inside it, almost hidden by a thick growth of grass and weeds, was an unused well which the children had unfortunately discovered.

"They wath boardth on top of it and big rockth, and Thuthan wanted to find out what wath inthide," explained Dilly. "We tried to make her thtop."

Rose scarcely heard, scarcely dared to breathe, for her whole attention was absorbed by the boards which the children had pulled away, and which now hung over the edge ready to slide in without warning. She could not tell what magic had kept the least secure one from following Susan in her fall, and at first glance it seemed impossible to touch either without imperilling the others.

"Billy, you take hold of the end of that board—don't pull—just hold it whatever happens," she said out of a dry throat. "And, Dilly, you do the same with this one. Oh, please, hold tight. If I can't do this something dreadful may happen."

Dilly stared at her. "Why don't you call ——"

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“Sh-shut up!” said Billy, “and t-t-take hold. I-if you l-let go I’ll s-s-smack you.”

Slowly, with the utmost caution, Rose pulled into security the board that seemed most dangerous, and when it was done felt for one sick moment that she could not move again.

“D-Dilly’s b-board could g-go next,” suggested Billy, who had been studying the situation, and Rose, helped into action, moved around to grasp the end Dilly had been holding.

“You keep still somewhere,” said Rose, and in their absorption neither she nor Billy noticed that Dilly withdrew herself stealthily, and a moment later ran off as fast as her legs could carry her.

With the second board out of the way that danger was over. Billy pulled the third one into safety, while Rose threw herself flat on the ground and peered into the dark depths of the well. “Susan!” she called, and again, “Susan!” but there was no answering sound. The sharp realization came to her that there was no one to help; everything depended on her.

“L-ladder,” crooned Billy’s comforting stammer close to her ear. “I s-saw one.” He was off like a shot with Rose following.

“It’s too big and heavy,” gasped Rose, when they had carried the ladder back to the well. “I—I don’t dare to try to let it down there for fear of

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hitting Susan. I'll have to climb down myself. Help me find a rope, Billy."

Again Billy was off like a flash, singing something about rope and shed as if he knew where things were likely to be kept in the country. Rose went down on the ground again, and felt around inside the well to see if there were projecting stones, or anything which she could grasp in going down. "Susan, it's Rose," she called again. "I'm coming down to get you." As before, there was no response, and Rose got up with a shudder and went to meet Billy who was returning with a coil of rope.

"We'll put it around——" she began, and turned to look for a tree to which it might be attached. Billy's eyes followed hers, and then they stared at each other blankly. There was no tree near, and nothing else that would be strong enough for the purpose.

"I was going to put it 'round my waist while I climbed down," Rose said with a quaver in her voice, "but it doesn't matter."

"T-two c-can hold it," stammered Billy, and for the first time realized that his sister had disappeared. "Wh-wh-where's D-D-Dilly?" he gasped, with a horrified stare at the well. "In th-there?"

"She's run off somewhere," Rose answered impatiently. "Never mind about the rope. You

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might hold it as hard as you can, Billy—if I slip perhaps it will help to keep me from falling.”

“ I’ll t-tell Ma on th-that Dilly,” Billy muttered, his excitement giving him unusual ease of expression. “ I’m always saying I w-will—and I n-never do—b-b-but th-this time ——”

“ Don’t bother about that,” said Rose, who by now had knotted the cord about her waist.

Billy took hold of the other end with a do-or-die expression in his eyes; then lay flat on his back, digging his heels into the ground.

“ Drop the rope if I fall and pull you,” ordered Rose, feeling with her foot for a resting-place in the rocky wall of the well. There was a murmur from Billy whose face was upturned to the sky and who was trying with all his might to hold the rope just right. He was strong in the decision that he should not let go until he was pulled to the very edge.

After what seemed to her an age Rose’s head disappeared below the top of the well, and presently she found herself, with arms painfully outstretched and the most insecure of toe-holds, clinging for a last despairing moment to the top edge, and hating to let go. At last she loosed the grip of one hand and felt around until she touched a projecting rock about at the level of her neck; then she managed to bring the other hand down to a place near the first one. After that one foot cautiously hunted a rest-

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ing-place a little farther down. When she needed so much to hurry this slow progress was almost unbearable, but Rose held herself rigidly to it. The slight pressure of the rope around her waist gave her comfort, though she perfectly realized that Billy would have to let go if she started to fall.

She must have been about half-way down when panic seized her. Suppose she should fall now on top of Susan! Why hadn't she thought of that danger before? This was a foolhardy thing she was trying to do. She should have called the neighbors and they could have helped with the ladder. Her mind ran through a dozen ways, all better than the one she was trying. One hand slipped a little and she gripped the projecting bit of rock fiercely, and realized for the first time how sore and stiff her fingers were.

She forgot them directly, however, because it flashed through her mind that the very last time she and Susan had been together—was it really this same afternoon?—she had been cross to Susan and had teased her. She should never be able to forget that if—if Susan—she forced the dreadful thought out of her mind only to have its place taken by another. Hanging there, rigid with the fear that this was a reckless and dangerous attempt, she saw clearly, for the first time in her life, that she had always been trying to make her small world run to

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suit her; that she had scarcely ever tried willingly to adapt herself to the ways of others.

“Don’t let me remember these things now,” came the instant plea. “Let me get to Susan. I must take care of Susan.” And then, mechanically, she began to feel about with one foot, and the tension of the last moment relaxed.

It was just after this, when she was trying to force her aching hand to let go and find another place to grip, that she felt the rope tighten strongly, and, at once, almost a sense of security took possession of her. Then a voice, a grown-up voice, which she seemed to know, but could not recognize, spoke to her from above.

“You’re all right now,” the voice said comfortingly. “Billy and I can hold you.”

For an instant Rose shook all over and clung tightly with toes and fingers; then without a word she began again to feel her way downward. An increasingly painful way it was, for she had scraped her cheek and chin against the rocks, and her hands hurt more and more. Nothing mattered, though, she told herself, if she did not fall on Susan.

A moment later a bit of rock, dislodged by her groping foot, went rattling down to the bottom of the well, which, if Rose could judge by the sound, was not far away. Instantly she was afraid that it might hit Susan, and just then her sister’s voice,

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whimpering and frightened, startled her. "Ouch!" it said. "Dilly Becker, you stop!"

"Susan!" she called softly. "Susan, it's Rose. You're all right now." She wanted desperately to hurry—to look down—but dared to attempt neither. All she could do was to continue her slow progress: one aching hand seeking a place to grip, and then the other; then a foot, which hated to leave security and groped painfully for a point of support. "I'm almost there, Susan," she said, and hoped it was true.

There was a faint rustling beneath her as if Susan were trying to move around. Then the plaintive voice again, "I—I don't like it here—I want Daddy."

"Just a minute and I'll take care of you. I have to go slowly and ——"

"If you don't be careful you'll put your foot in my face," interrupted Susan petulantly. "I don't see why you keep waving it 'wound like that."

That was so like her small sister that Rose laughed, but for once felt more like crying. Then she put her foot down with exceeding care and found that she could stand.

"I'm down, Billy," she called exultantly, and then she went down on her knees beside Susan. "Let me feel your arms and legs, Susan. Where does anything hurt?"

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“Here,” answered Susan, guiding her sister’s hand to her cheek and then to the back of her head. “Nothing hurts much, and there isn’t anything the matter with my arms and legs,” she went on, as Rose felt of her anxiously; “and I’m not going to cwy.”

“Of course you’re not. We’re going to get you out of here,” promised Rose, wondering how it was to be done, and just then that same comforting voice from above answered her unspoken question.

“I’m going to put the ladder down now, and you can guide it when it gets within reach.”

To Rose, looking upward toward the bright sky, the face peering over the edge of the well was blurred and unrecognizable, but the voice was a woman’s voice. “Oh, do you think you can hold that ladder?” she cried involuntarily. “It’s so heavy.”

“And I’m so strong,” the voice exulted. “You wait and see how gently it will come down.”

Rose could not help feeling confidence in the promise, though she caught her breath quickly as the ladder slid over the edge and tipped downward. “I have it,” she called a moment later. “Now if I can only find a place where it will be firm.”

“Huh! I can climb that ladder,” said Susan, who was on her feet now, and had regained in a degree her unconquerable spirit. “Let me twy.”

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She took a step forward as she spoke and swayed dizzily against her sister. "Phwee!" she remarked in a surprised voice, "my head feels all tippy."

"You don't expect to fall down a well and not feel something, do you?" questioned Rose, who by this time had steadied the ladder. "Now I'm going to put this rope 'round your waist, and then I'll go up just behind you."

"That's good planning," said the voice from above. "I'll keep it firm up here. Only—are you sure you feel quite steady, Miss Rose?"

"I'm all right," answered Rose, and did not know until she took her first step on the ladder that her feet felt as if they did not belong to her and her hands were shaking. It was only by using all the will-power she possessed that she made herself mount step by step after Susan, whose courage grew sadly less as she ascended.

"I don't like this—I—I want to go back—I'm 'fraid I'm—I'm going to l-let go my hands," she whimpered when they were about half-way up. She was beginning to sway, and her whole body shook.

Rose pressed her closely from behind and from sheer fright spoke sternly. "Don't you dare let go, Susan Sheldon! Do you want to make us both fall?"

"Not many more steps now; she's coming

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straight ahead,” encouraged the voice from above calmly. “Count them, Susan, as you come; if there are not more than ten I’ll give you something I’ve got in my pocket.”

“One,” said Susan in a quavering voice, and took a fresh start. Rose breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed the tightness of her grip. For a moment she had been so frightened she had not felt the misery of her bruised hands.

“Eight! That isn’t so much as ten, is it?” demanded Susan, as somebody took hold of her strongly and set her on solid ground. Rose, just behind her, was grateful for the supporting hand that gripped her arm and helped her to step around the side of the ladder. For the first moment she was almost blinded by the brightness of the world, then she realized that she was looking into the kind, anxious face of Miss Eunice Dean.

“Oh, was it you—all the time?” she faltered, perfectly aware how foolish a question it was, yet quite unable to avoid asking it. And then her shaky knees gave way, and she sat down suddenly and felt, to her horror, that if anyone spoke to her she should cry. She bent her head and stared steadily at the ground and swallowed hard; she simply couldn’t stand weepy girls.

“Put your hand in my pocket, Susan,” said Miss Dean, quite as if nothing unusual had hap-

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pened, "and pull out the paper-bag you'll find there."

Susan put out her hand, then drew it back. "Anything in the bag?" she demanded with suspicion in her tone. Susan never let anyone play a trick on her if she could help it. At Miss Dean's nod her searching fingers plunged into the deep pocket, and her face brightened as she peered into the bag. "Gum-dwops!" she exulted. "Now I don't care if I did get bumped."

She turned to Dilly and Billy, and then her eyes found her sister and she went down on her knees beside her. "You came down for me, didn't you, and bwinged me up?" she said in her sweetest voice. "Have a gum-dwop; it'll make you feel better."

"Thuck it and then you can't cry," advised Dilly, who usually discovered just what persons least wanted her to know.

Billy turned on her suddenly. "D-d-don't b-bother her," he said. "Sh-she's a g-g-good sport."

"Billy Becker, where did you learn thuch a word? Rothe ith not."

"Oh, I hope I am," Rose protested. "And, Billy, you're a good one, too, and I'm never going to forget it." Somehow going down into the well had changed the world for her. Billy's red head

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was a beautiful sight; Miss Dean seemed almost an old friend; even Dilly ——

“I think you didn’t ought to forget me,” hinted Dilly, herself, with an injured air. “I thuppothe I might have a gum-drop; I brought the biggetht help.”

“D-D-Dilly!” said her brother helplessly, turning so red his freckles hardly showed.

“You needn’t Dilly me. Everyone thendth for Mith Dean when they’re in trouble. Mother thayth tho. I’m thurprithed, Billy Becker, you didn’t have thenth enough to ——”

“My goodness, we’re forgetting all about bumps,” interrupted Miss Dean. “And Susan’s cheek is scratched, and there’s a bruise on Rose’s chin. Let’s go into the house and find some nice comfy stuff to put on them.”

“My hands are the worst of my hurts,” Rose admitted, turning them palms up for Miss Dean’s inspection.

“My dear girl! And you’ve sat there without a mite of fuss with your hands scraped and torn like that.” Miss Dean took command of the situation at once. “Billy, put your hand in this other pocket,” she said hastily, and then when another small bag appeared, “divide that with Dilly, and you both go and sit on the front steps till I come out. Then I’ll take you home with me.”

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"I'll thee that Billy doethn't go near the well or get into any mithchief," promised Dilly as well as she could with a large gum-drop in her mouth. "My father will come thoon and take me home."

"You'd never guess it was Billy's father, too, would you?" laughed Miss Dean as they started for the house. "I never did see such a self-satisfied child."

"Well, anyway, she did the right thing when she ran for you," Rose said gratefully. "Susan and I would still have been down in that dark hole. I hadn't thought any farther ahead than just to get down there and see whether ——" she stopped with a shudder.

"Yes, yes, I know," Miss Dean answered hastily, and then to Susan, "It was a bad bump, wasn't it, dear, and it took you a few minutes to wake up."

"Ho! I wasn't asleep. I stepped on a board, and Dilly pulled it, and I went down ker-plop, and—and then Rose said, 'You're all safe now,' and I told her, 'Don't you put your foot in my face.'"

"Exactly. There certainly doesn't seem to be any time for a nap there," said Miss Dean with a twinkle. "And when we get a small piece of plaster on that scratched cheek you'll hardly know that anything has happened."

“DING! DONG! BELL!”

“Is it 'nuff to make Jimsey feel bad?”

“Plenty. We'll make the plaster big enough for that.” They were in the kitchen by this time and Miss Eunice was lifting the cover of the tea-kettle. “Now we'll boil some water, and I'll hunt up bandages and salve; I know exactly where Aunt Serena used to keep all those things.”

Miss Dean worked fast and skilfully. It seemed no time at all before there was a bit of plaster on Susan's cheek and something soothing on the back of her head. Meanwhile Rose's hands had been soaking in hot water, and after they were softly dried, a salve, deliciously cool and fragrant, was dabbed on with absorbent cotton.

“You seem to know just how to do it,” Rose said, watching with interested eyes.

“I took a short course in nursing. There has to be someone in a place like this who can handle things before the doctor gets here. You've just got to be neighborly—oh, did I hurt you?” She was putting on a bandage and she stopped suddenly.

Rose shook her head. She had winced unconsciously, not under the gentle touch of Miss Dean's fingers, but at the memory of what she, herself, had been thinking on the day of their arrival about neighbors in general and this one in particular.

“Now we'll put a large soft handkerchief around each hand,” said Miss Eunice. “Why don't you

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both go out on the front porch and sit till the folks come home? ”

“ I couldn’t go out there in this dress,” Rose objected. “ It’s a sight. And Susan’s is, too.”

“ Suppose I play lady’s maid and help you both into clean ones, and then I’ll run off with the twin-nies.”

Somewhat later they were out on the porch and Miss Dean was saying good-bye. “ I believe I wouldn’t let Susan run around much for the next hour,” she suggested, drawing Rose a little away from the others. “ It’s better to be sure that that bump doesn’t mean anything more than it seems to mean.”

“ Do you think it’s anything serious?” Rose was anxious at once.

“ No; if I did I should telephone for the doctor. I believe in being on the safe side, though, and it won’t hurt her to keep quiet for a while. You may have to entertain her a little—play some guessing game or tell her a story. I don’t believe I’d read to her—it might make her sleepy, and I should rather she wouldn’t go to sleep just now.”

Dilly and Billy came to the porch to say good-bye, and Susan viewed the former with a disapproving air. “ The next time p’waps you won’t pull a board when my foot’s on it,” she observed severely.

“ After thith p’rapph you’ll mind uth when we

"DING! DONG! BELL!"

tell you not to do thumthing," retorted Dilly, who was not easily put down.

Billy snuggled close to Rose for a bashful moment. "I l-like you," he stammered softly. "You are a p-p-peach."

"What are you thaying, Billy Becker? Ith it polite?" demanded his sharp-eyed sister. "Excethe Billy, pleathe, if ——"

"Come on; we must go," interrupted Miss Dean. "Come over to-morrow and let me have a look at those hands, will you, Miss Rose? And then you can tell me if Susan is as frisky as a kitten," she called back as they went down the path.

Rose took one chair and Susan climbed into another. Her doll, which she had brought down to show to Dilly, she held with motherly devotion. For a few moments neither spoke, then Susan sighed deeply and shifted her child from one arm to the other. "I don't like to sit so still," she said with a prolonged yawn that worried her sister. Then she wriggled in her chair, cast a longing glance toward the garden, clutched Geraldine carelessly with her head sagging downward.

"Want me to tell you a story?"

"No, thanks. I don't b'lieve you could so well as Connie—or Anne." Susan's voice was sweet and her manner very polite. She looked sober, and Rose, watching her, began to wonder if she could

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have been hurt more than they suspected. It was not like Susan to be so gentle or to refuse a story, even poorly told.

"Don't you feel well?" ventured Rose, wishing that Father or Anne would come and take the weight of responsibility from her. Thank goodness Effie would be there before long, and she knew how to take care of sick people.

"I—I've got kind of a—a pain wight here," quavered Susan, laying her hand on her chest. "I think if I could go out and put those boards back 'fore Daddy ——"

"You couldn't put them back alone," interrupted Rose, much relieved. Experience made her understand at once what kind of a pain her sister had. "Daddy'll have to know, anyway, so that well can be filled," she went on with a shudder. "I don't see why it was left that way."

"It was all tight when I saw it first." Susan was finding confession helpful. "And Dilly did tell me not to, but she helped push the big wocks off. Billy kept twying to say something, but I couldn't wait for him."

"You knew you ought not to do it, didn't you?"

"Ye-es, but I guess I must have wanted to be naughty. You made me cwoss when I was upstairs—and I had to do something."

"Oh, it's my fault, is it? Well, I think it's rather

“ DING! DONG! BELL! ”

sneaky to put the blame on someone else. I made Anne cross, too, but I don't believe ——” Rose stopped abruptly. It had flashed into her mind that not so very long ago she had been putting the responsibility for her own shortcomings on Anne's shoulders. She could hear herself saying, “ You got me into this,” and Anne had retorted, “ I wish you'd play fair.”

“ ‘ If the coat fits put it on,’ and ‘ What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander,’ ” she quoted suddenly to her small sister's amazement.

“ I'm not a goose,” Susan retorted sulkily. She had not understood, but she was sure of this.

“ Well, maybe you're not, but I am. And Anne's a darling duck. Let's start over again, Susan, and not do the things we know are naughty. Then we shan't have to feel sorry about them.”

Susan shook her head doubtfully. “ But when someone makes you naughty,” she persisted with unshaken seriousness.

“ Oh, fudge! No one can really make you naughty except yourself.” And then with a sudden clear vision of how much easier it was to tell others how to be good than to be so herself, Rose changed the subject. “ Let's play a sitting-still game,” she suggested. “ I'm thinking of something ”—she paused impressively—“ something big and rough, and often noisy ——”

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"I know," Susan interrupted, "you mean Ellis. But it isn't polite to talk about him that way when he isn't here."

"I do not mean Ellis. You're not so smart as you think you are. Try it again. It's big and rough and noisy and—and shaggy."

"O-ho! Shaggy! I guess ——" Susan stopped and turned a listening ear toward the road. "I hear autos. There's one coming with Anne and Connie in it and—and someone else. And there's something big and noisy and shaggy coming wight to this house." Susan, forgetting her motherly duty, dropped her doll on the chair, and flew to meet the splendid tawny dog who almost knocked her down with his enthusiastic greeting.

Rose stood up feeling excited, too. If Rex had come then Effie must be there. Yes, Miss Dean's chauffeur was helping her out of the car. And just behind were Daddy and Ellis in Mr. Becker's automobile—they must have come by way of Miss Dean's, for Dilly and Billy were in the car. Now the Beckers had driven away, and Father and Ellis had joined the other group; and they seemed all to be talking at once. Rose felt a sudden impulse to run off to her own room and shut herself in, but before she could start Rex came to lavish caresses upon her and sniff somewhat doubtfully at the bandaged hands.

“ DING! DONG! BELL! ”

“ Hello, Effie,” she said the next moment.
“ My, but I’m glad to see you! ”

Effie smiled and looked pleased, and then a little anxious. “ Are you hurt much? ” she asked briefly.

“ Just enough to keep me from washing dishes for the rest of the summer,” laughed Rose. “ Are you going to take Effie up to her room, Con? I hope you’ll find everything all right, Effie.”

Effie was plainly surprised at this unusual solicitude, but she only smiled again, and picked up her bag in lieu of saying anything.

“ We hadn’t any idea of finding Effie when we started,” explained Connie, lingering. “ The Ramsays wanted to show us what a beautiful drive it is to Shannon Junction, and when we reached it there were Effie and darling old Rex. The ‘ old girl ’ was late again, and that funny station-man was terribly excited.”

“ Humph! ” said Rose. “ I should think they’d get a new engine.” She turned to look at the group near the automobile as Effie and Connie departed. Father and Ellen Ramsay and Ellis were just starting for the garden, and Anne, who had been standing by the car talking to Neil, turned toward the house at that moment and came running up the path.

“ Oh, Rose,” she said breathlessly, “ it was perfectly splendid of you to go down that awful well.

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Daddy's just shining with pride over it and so are the rest of us. And I'm—I'm so sorry I was cross. Do your hands hurt awfully?"

"Hardly at all now. And it wasn't your fault you were cross."

"Oh, yes it was," Anne responded with conviction. "Come and see Neil," she went on; "the others have gone to talk garden, and he wants to speak to you."

"Well, I don't much want to speak to him—he'll ask me why I didn't go this afternoon," began Rose, but a call from the car and the vigorous waving of Neil's hand stopped her. "Oh, all right, I'm coming," she said.

"Look at the baseball mitts!" Neil called as she approached. "Say, wasn't that a great chance for you to show what you're made of? How did it feel to be crawling down there? Crikey! I wish I could have done it." There was pure envy in his tone.

"It wasn't so much," Rose answered. "The well had been partly filled up, and Susan was hardly hurt at all, and ——"

"But you didn't know all that," Neil interrupted. "Oh, I say, this is going to make you doubly valuable to me as instructor of athletics in my boys' club. They'll think you're a crackerjack."

"I told you I haven't patience enough to teach

“ DING! DONG! BELL! ”

anyone,” Rose answered petulantly, not at all sure that she liked having her refusals swept aside in this way.

“ Oh, that doesn’t matter. We’ve just got to have you, so that settles it.”

“ But suppose I won’t.”

“ Then I shall keep on asking until you will. What’s the matter? Got too much to do at home? Are you helping out about the garden? I know your father needs all the help he can get.”

“ No-o,” faltered Rose. “ I haven’t been asked to work in the garden.”

“ Oh! Do you wait to be asked to do things like that?” There was amazement in the boy’s eyes. “ Well, of course, it’s none of my business. I shan’t let you off from teaching my boys though. Oh, here comes Ellen.”

Mr. Sheldon and Ellis and Anne clustered about the car as Ellen got in. “ I think you’re wonderful,” she said, leaning out to speak to Rose. “ We’ve been looking at the place where you went down. I should have been scared blue and perfectly helpless.”

Rose flushed under the admiring glances of her family. “ I was afraid, but I thought there wasn’t anything else to do.”

“ That’s the finest kind of courage—to do things when you’re scared,” said Neil. “ We must go,

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Ellen. Hegan will be out hunting for me if I don't get home soon."

"Please come and see us," added Ellen, as the car began to move. "I want to ask a lot more about gardens, Mr. Sheldon."

Walking slowly back to the house, Rose stuck her hand under her father's arm and then laughed at the sight of it. "Looks like a large white paw, doesn't it, Daddy?"

"Oh, Posy," he began, squeezing her arm gently as if she had suddenly become fragile, "I'm so proud of my daughter I——"

"Ple-ase, let's not talk about it," begged Rose. "It gives me the shivers. Daddy, darling, just as soon as my hands get well I'm going to apply for a position as under-gardener. Will you take me on?"

"I should say we would. Ellis and I didn't want to ask you until after Effie came, and you got a little used to things here." Father's voice was full of glad excitement. "That was Ellis' idea; your big brother is growing very wise and thoughtful these days. We need you badly, though, Posy."

They did want her, then. What a goose she had been! No wonder Neil had looked at her queerly. Rose was conscious of a fluttering thankfulness that made her voice unsteady as she answered, "All right, sir; I'll be there." She felt an unusual light-

“DING! DONG! BELL!”

ness of spirit—a queer certainty that this day was going to mean a great deal to her.

“Good old scout, Rosie.” Ellis caught up to them with Anne, and he slipped his arm under Rose’s, and her hand rested on his outstretched palm. Father drew Anne close on the other side, and thus linked they went on toward the house.

The mellow light of the late afternoon gleamed and twinkled in the windows of the house as they approached. Connie and Susan, and Jim, who had just got home, were sitting on the steps, petting Rex. Such a nice family, Rose was thinking; and this was certainly a cosy house of Anne’s, and Brookfield seemed a pleasant place after all.

“‘The Big Four,’” Ellis murmured, breaking the silence. He was always thinking up titles for movies and never getting any farther. “Or, if you want a thriller, call it ‘The Captive Maiden.’”

Rose laughed. “Make it a movie ‘suitable for all ages,’” she said quickly. “Let’s call it ‘The Home Team.’”

CHAPTER IX

GUM-SHOE GOLF

"SHE said I was to go over to-day and let her look at my hands, so I suppose it wouldn't be very polite not to," Rose said doubtfully the next afternoon. "Effie knows how to take care of my hands, though."

"Are you talking about Miss Dean?" asked her father. "Why, of course you must go. Even if your hands don't need her, you ought to call there and thank her for her kindness. Why don't you get Anne or Connie to go with you?"

"I'd rather go alone." Not being able to do anything with her hands, Rose had had a long, dull morning, and the prospect of this call wasn't very enlivening. "I'll have to get Nan to help me about my hair and dress."

A half hour later she was ready to start. "I'll only have to stay a little while, Nan," she said, lingering on the porch with her sister. "Miss Dean's such a busy woman she wouldn't want me for long."

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"You can tell that when you get there—oh, are those the Becker twins in that automobile?"

"No. You couldn't fool me on those children now. I just love Billy's little red head. He's my friend for life."

"I think you ought to call Dilly your friend, too. She certainly was clever enough to do just the right thing."

"All right then," conceded Rose, "she's my friend. But Billy's my beloved friend. There's a difference, you know. Well, I'm off." She was feeling more cheerful than when she went up-stairs, and in her glance lurked the spirit of adventure. "I'll probably be back in half an hour."

But it was two hours later that she burst into Anne's room again so full of joyful information that she began to talk before she got there.

"I've had the time of my life," she announced. "Miss Eunice is awfully nice, but Miss Emeline's the dearest thing you ever saw. I'm surprised to think you haven't been to see her, Anne Sheldon." There was a twinkle in Rose's eyes as she said this last, and an answering one in Anne's when she answered.

"I didn't dare to go," she said coolly. "I was afraid of what you'd say to me."

Rose laughed. "You may go any time now," she chuckled. "I'd like to see you staying away from

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any place just because you didn't have my permission. Miss Emeline's awfully interesting," she went on with a little sigh. "She's taught a lot of the women near here to make rugs and bedspreads, and she sells what they make or sends them away to be sold. When she was young she studied design, so she helps these people about colors and patterns." Rose stopped for breath and stooped to let Anne take out her hatpin. Then she bent her head almost to the level of the bed and cleverly slid out from under her hat.

"She encourages them to make original designs, and some of them are wonderful," she went on. "And she has the duckiest shop you ever saw. I wanted to play store in it."

"Did Miss Eunice think your hands were getting on well?"

"Oh, yes. Miss Emeline sent out for her, and she left her work to come in and look at 'em. And, Nan, she's got a wonderful farming suit! Miss Emeline has material like it in her shop and a pattern and everything. I've just got to have one as soon as my hands get well. Miss Emeline said she'd show me how to make it."

"That's nice," said Anne. "I should almost think, though——" she hesitated, and wished she had not begun.

"Go on," Rose murmured resignedly. "I al-

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ways expect to have cold water splashed on my pet plans."

"I was only going to say that you had some old clothes you might wear for garden work."

"I just knew you were going to say that. I don't see why I put those old duds in my trunk, anyway. Let's give 'em away, and then they won't prick my conscience." Rose laughed, and then went on seriously. "I'm sure I could work better in a suit like the one Miss Eunice wears. I'm going out to explain to Daddy about it."

For a few days after this, though her hands were healing quickly, Rose found it hard to know what to do with herself. Then, one morning, her father suggested that a certain part of the garden might be used for a tennis-court if it were large enough, and she went directly to measure it off with Jimsey's help. It would do so far as size was concerned, but her enthusiasm waned when she saw the rocks and hollows and hummocks.

"Too rough, is it?" asked her father, who was just going by and could read her disappointment in her sober face. "It would be quite an achievement, wouldn't it, to get something even passable out of what looks impossible?"

"I suppose so," Rose agreed doubtfully, but, nevertheless, her ambition was fired by the suggestion, and she studied the place critically. It should

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be dug up and levelled and rolled, but that would cost too much. If she could get rid of the stones and fill up the worst holes, perhaps ——

“I believe we can get some fun out of it even if it isn't very good.” She turned suddenly, only to find that both Jimsey and her father had departed. “Well, it seems to be up to me,” she thought, looking at her hands, now protected only by loose gloves. “If it weren't for these paws of mine I'd begin on the rocks. I believe, anyway, I can rake up the small stones.”

She got a rake and began to draw the smaller stones into heaps, but after using her hands as carefully as she could for only a little while she gave it up in despair.

“No can do,” she said, with a rueful smile at her father, who was again passing near the future tennis court. “I'd stick it out and stand the hurt, only I'm afraid it would keep them from getting well.”

“That would be poor business. You need those hands and so do we.” Father's gaze travelled from her to Susan and Jim, who were watching Connie as she worked in her garden. “You know, Posy, when something like this is started it isn't always necessary for the one at the head of it to do the actual work. It takes another kind of ability to direct others and keep them busy and pleased

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with their job. Think it over and don't give up."

Rose caught the idea at once and it suited her. "I think I could hire Susan and Jimsey," she began doubtfully, "but—Daddy, would you mind advancing me two dimes on my next allowance?"

Mr. Sheldon plunged his hand into his pocket. "Considering that you will be improving the property we won't call it your allowance. You can be the contractor and hire your workmen, and I'll provide the wages."

"Oh, Daddy, that's darling of you. I hoped you would, but I didn't like to ask," Rose confessed with her usual honesty. "Now I'll see what they say."

She went over to where the children were still watching Connie. "Susan, will you and Jimsey be an express company and carry away the rocks from the tennis-ground?" she proposed. "I'll give you ten cents apiece for it."

"Sure. I would without the money," agreed Jim.

"You can unload the big ones here, because I want a rockery," said Connie.

As easily as this the business part was settled. Jim ran to get his cart, Susan was all enthusiasm over the promised dime, and in a few minutes a flourishing express business was started.

Rose decided that it would be her part to see that

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they did not work too hard, nor too long at a time. It would be nice, she thought, to surprise them with a lunch in the middle of the morning. As she surveyed the rock-strewn field she wished with all her heart that she could rake. It would help a lot if the smaller stones were in neat little heaps. Absent-mindedly she lifted a large pebble with the toe of her shoe and landed it cleverly next to another one not far away. She successfully tried another, and, behold, there was the beginning of a stone-heap.

“Hurrah! If I can’t work with my hands I can with my feet,” she thought jubilantly, and tried her luck again. This time she was farther away from her goal and it took three attempts, but she landed it finally. Something made her look in sudden alarm at her shoe. “Crikey! Even second-besters are too good for this,” she decided, and the next moment remembered that in her closet was a pair of outworn shoes which should have been left behind when she packed, but had somehow crept into her trunk—rubber-soled shoes with the heel-part beginning to flap, and holes in the leather.

Ten minutes later she had changed to the old shoes, had stopped in the kitchen for a short confab with Effie, and was back on the ground again experimenting with her new idea which, after the first heap of stones was completed, she triumphantly



"IT'S A NEW GAME; QUITE FUN, TOO."

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named "gum-shoe golf." It was better fun than doing nothing, she decided, and she began to make a real game of it by trying to see with how few lifts she could land a stone in a desired spot.

Suddenly she found Jimsey regarding her efforts with curiosity. "What are you doing?" he questioned, as his gaze roved from the heap he was at work on to the other neat piles. "Say, have you—have you hopped all those that way?"

"Uh-huh," nodded Rose, delicately lifting a stone in one attempt to the very top of the heap, where, to her astonishment, it stayed. "It's a new game; quite fun, too."

"I want to play it," said Susan, who, too exhausted to touch another rock, was resting in the cart. "I—I b'lieve I'll like that better than wocks; I'm tired of those."

"I bet I can do one in fewer kicks than you can, Rose," said Jimsey excitedly. "Let's choose two at 'bout the same distance from the heap."

Ellis, who had stopped to see what was going on, took in the idea at a glance. "You ought to give Rose a handicap; she's had more practise," he said. "Here, I'll show you how good a score can be made."

"Smarty!" retorted Rose gaily. "Now listen, children, you mustn't really kick 'em; you just get your toe under and lift. Susan, you go way up in

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that corner and start a new heap; we don't want too many here."

"I'll help Susan." Connie had strolled over to see why the express company had stopped supplying her with rocks.

"Now, Ellis," began Rose, and then paused. "Wait a minute; here's Father coming. Come on, Daddy; this is a tournament, and we want you to enter. I'll show you how we do it, but this won't count for me."

"I should think you'd be glad it didn't," giggled Jimsey, as his sister made elaborate preparation and then lifted her stone about six inches.

"Never mind; I'll make up for it next time. You see what I mean, Daddy," Rose answered undisturbed. "Go on, Ellis."

Mr. Sheldon watched while Ellis made a really beautiful goal in one stroke; Jimsey, laughing until he couldn't see straight, took three lifts to get there; while Rose, whom luck had deserted for the moment, sent her stone in all directions but the right one. Then Mr. Sheldon's shoe involuntarily inserted itself under a stone, and with one clean lift he landed it in just a little better position than the one Ellis had achieved.

"I can't have this," Rose said excitedly. "I invented this game and you're all beating me. Let's start a new heap and see how quickly we can

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fill it. Jimsey, just put two or three stones together for a beginning, and then you and I must make a better record."

"Any limit to the number of players, or is it a free-for-all?" asked an amused voice suddenly. They had been so absorbed that no one had seen Effie open the door for a big dark-haired boy and point out the family group to him. "Do you mind if I ask why the whole family is hopping around in this strange way?" he went on as they all turned to look at him.

"Archie! By all that's jolly!" exclaimed Ellis, making a leap for him. "Where did you come from?"

"From my summer home," answered Archie Bradley mysteriously, his gaze roving from one to another of the group. "Where's Anne? She's here, isn't she?"

"Of course," Rose answered. "Tell us where you left Roger. And is Mr. Pearson with you, and how's your uncle?"

"Roger is—is in his summer home," grinned Archie; "and—and Mr. Pearson is at his summer home. And Uncle is very well and has gone to Oregon. Now you know all about us, so show me Anne, and tell me what under the sun you were doing when I interrupted."

"Why this," explained Rose, "this is a game in-

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tended to clear the tennis-ground of stones. I made it up and it is called gum-shoe golf. It's very nice because you don't have to carry heavy clubs. You just have to put on shoes like these." She stuck out a dilapidated shoe which, even in so short a time, looked worse than it had when she had put it on, and as she surveyed it her mischievous smile faded.

"Oh, my goodness, what have I done?" she wailed. "Don't ever let Anne Sheldon know that I've got the entire family into playing a game that will ruin their shoes. Daddy, why did you let me do it?"

"I hadn't got 'round to thinking about that part of it," Mr. Sheldon answered guiltily. "I'm no kind of a proper parent."

"Yes, you are. Yes, you are." Susan hugged his legs with a suddenness that nearly unbalanced him. "You're the best Daddy I ever had."

"Probably. But, children, let's promise not to play this attractive game, invented by your clever sister, unless we are wearing shoes as old—as old as hers look. Is it a bargain?"

"I don't like the old game anyway; it's stupid," said Susan, who had not been very successful. "I pwomise never to play it again, shoes or no shoes. I'm too hungr-ry to play anything."

"Oh, that makes me think," said Rose, starting

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toward the house, "I've got a date with Effie. Back in a minute." She went on for a few steps, then the sudden opening of the back door and the sight of Anne carrying a tray made her pause.

"Fiddle!" she said to herself disgustedly. "It was my party and now it will be Nan's. She always gets the credit of doing the nice things."

"I'll help her," cried Archie, dashing by Rose and surprising Anne to such a degree that she nearly dropped the tray. "Anne, even without such good-looking eats I'd be glad to see you," he said, when he had cleverly rescued her burden.

"Would you really? That's awfully kind of you." Anne was walking toward the family group, to which Rose had soberly retreated. "But you needn't thank me for this lunch. This is Rose's party."

"I was just going to feed my—my workmen," explained Rose, secretly ashamed because she had been cross. "Let's sit down; the grass is warm. I'm thankful Effie made my idea bigger."

"Well, she knew Archie had come," observed Connie, quite as if that were enough to explain any amount of extra food.

"She probably remembered how I used to eat last spring when you let me stay to dinner. But I never expected you to remind me of it, Connie,"

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said Archie in a grieved tone. "Next to Anne you were my best friend in this family."

"Am still," Connie replied, at the same moment politely accepting a cream cheese sandwich. "Um! Good!" she went on hastily. "Try one of these, and your feelings will feel better. Anyway, you can't make me think you're very sad when your eyes dance like mad."

"You can't be sad
When your eyes dance like mad,"

sang Jimsey, and then blushing rolled out of sight behind his father.

"Gracious! Have you got a poet in your family, too? Roger goes murmuring around, and scribbles things about billows and willows and—and pillows, I guess, though that doesn't seem to fit in very well. Yes, thank you, I could eat another cookie if I was urged."

"I suppose you've told the others where you came from and all about the rest of the family," Anne remarked. "And, by the way, what were you all doing out here a little while ago? Before Archie came it must have been, because I didn't see him. It seemed as if you were hopping around on one foot, or something like that."

She was looking from one to another so inno-

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cently that Ellis went off into a stifled burst of laughter in which the others joined.

"What is it? Why are you laughing at me?" demanded Anne.

"De-ah Anne," began Susan, who was as sober as possible and could see nothing funny in the situation; "de-ah Anne, they're laughing 'cause they're foolish. We were just playing a silly game that hurt ——"

"Oh, Susan! Have another cooky before they're all gone," Rose interrupted. "Archie didn't tell us one word, Nan, except that he'd come from his summer home, wherever that may be."

"Well, I'll tell you everything I know now," said that young gentleman. "I was too hungry before. It won't take long to tell. Do you remember I said last spring that I believed Brookfield was somewhere within a hundred miles of the place where Uncle was born? Well, it is, only it's three miles instead of a hundred, and Peter Pearson and Roger and I have come to spend the summer on the land that Uncle owns. That's all."

"All!" shouted Ellis, throwing his arms about Archie in a mad wrestle which upset them both. "All! You villain, why didn't you write us about it so that we could have the—the joy of anticipation?"

"Uncle didn't decide till about two weeks ago.

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Besides, we wanted to surprise you. Stop punching me, El, or I'll have to choke you!"

"I think you're too big to play like little boys," Susan remarked with cold disapproval. "'Sides, Archie's heel knocked that last cooky wight off the plate."

"Sorry. I apologize, Madam." Archie jerked himself from Ellis' grasp and sat up, trying to smooth his thick dark hair. "Let up now, Ellis. I expect I'll have to catch it from Roger and Mr. Pearson when I go back, so don't use up all my muscle."

"Why?" asked Anne. "What have you been doing now?"

"That's right. Blame it all on me," Archie retorted, trying to look hurt. "I suppose I deserve it, though. You see, we got here yesterday, and while we were fussing around getting ready for night, the kid hurt his foot—not much, but just enough to keep him from wanting to walk far today. We came up in the machine, and I've got to overhaul that before I can use it on these hills ——"

"Same old machine?" asked Rose eagerly. "The one I learned to drive? I hope it is."

"Uh-huh." Archie's face expressed deep gloom. "Same old flivver. I tried to get Uncle to think we needed a new one, but he said this would do for a while longer. I'd just skilfully taken him out of

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his way to show him a beauty, too. Grown people never seem to have the right ideas at the right time."

Mr. Sheldon, who was sitting back of the group, chuckled appreciatively, and Archie turned toward him a little abashed. "I forgot you were there, sir. But, of course, that was only a fool speech, and, anyway, you don't seem so dreadfully grown-up as some people do."

"He's just our brother-Daddy," said Connie. "He isn't really a grown-up."

"Well," Archie went on, "to go back to where I was. I got the breakfast and washed the dishes." He looked so proudly conscious of his exceeding worthiness that Anne giggled and he frowned at her. "Then, knowing that Roger couldn't walk three miles with a sore foot—in fact at that time I didn't know how far it was—and that P. Pearson wouldn't leave him alone there, I slid out and hiked till I found you."

"And about this time, I suppose, they're wildly anxious about you," Rose said disapprovingly.

"Not so fast, my child. They had gone off a little way to fish, and I pinned a large note—not on the pincushion, because we don't own one, but in a place where they couldn't fail to see it. So there!"

"Then it's all right and you can have dinner with us," said Anne. "And later on Mr. Bona-

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parte will take you home. I think he's equal to six miles, don't you, Ellis?"

"Oh, sure—if you take enough time—and sugar. Probably Archie would get there sooner if he walked."

"Not on your life! I prefer Mr. Bonaparte, whoever he may be. And while we're waiting for dinner I'll help you clear the tennis-court, Rose. I ought to because I expect to be invited to play."

Connie sprang to her feet. "Express company called to work after the rest hour," she said. "I hope there are more big rocks; I need them in my business. I'll help load the first wagon; hurry, or I'll get there first, Susan." And with this impetus the younger children were started and the work began to progress.

Mr. Sheldon and Ellis went back to their labors in the garden, Rose hurried off to find the rake which she had left in some forgotten spot, and Anne and Archie were alone for a few moments.

"Did you like the *Alice Bell* as much as you expected?" Anne asked eagerly. "You and Roger never said much in your letters except that you'd write more the next time."

Archie laughed. "That's one on us. I'm an awful slacker about letters," he confessed. "It was one grand old voyage, all the same, and the *Alice Bell* is a corker. We all think the girl who

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named her gave her a great start in life. And say, Anne, you certainly hypnotized Uncle. He got on with Roger like a breeze."

"Oh, did he? I'm so glad. I knew Roger would be all right when he was with his family."

Archie shook his head doubtfully. "He's a spoiled kid," he said slowly, "but somehow he makes us all like him so much that we can't be stern with him."

Archie had such a worried fatherly air that Anne wanted to laugh, but didn't. "What's the matter with him now?" she asked soberly.

"Well, naturally, Uncle wants him to go back to school next fall, but he's behind in some studies, and he's such a lazy cub he won't stick to any regular work with Mr. Pearson. Of course, when he does go back he won't be able to keep up and then he'll be miserable just as he was before."

"Oh, well, perhaps something will start him," Anne encouraged, feeling very vague as to what that something might be.

"Say, this is a peach of a little old house, and a great chance for a garden, isn't it?" Archie went on eagerly. "Do you mind if I come over and help dig?"

"We'd love it," Anne accepted with great promptness. "That's Daddy's biggest trouble—to get help—and the doctor says he mustn't do

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heavy work for some time. He's getting better already, though."

"He looks a lot better than when I saw him last, and he seems to like it here."

"He does. We all do—except Rose," Anne said with a sigh. "And she's trying to like it. There she comes now with the rake, and you'll have to work. I'll go in and finish what I was doing, and we'll meet at dinner-time."

To Rose it seemed like a bit of Melford to have Archie here, and she followed him around while he worked, and, because he coaxed it out of her, told him some of her troubles, and explained her gloved hands.

"That was corking of you," he said when she had finished and forebore to add more praise, for which she was thankful. "And I don't believe you're going to have such a bad time this summer. We must plan something right away to keep up your spirits."

"Goodness, I hope I'm not such a baby as that," Rose retorted, "and—and, anyway, I don't mind so much as I did. I—I seemed to find out some things by going down that well." She said the last half-doubtingly and more to herself than to him.

By noon the tennis-ground looked as if it were beginning to have some idea of the high purpose for

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which it was intended, and the workers retired to get ready for dinner, feeling that they had earned it.

"Now I've got one more thing to do—it'll take me about an hour," Ellis said as they left the table, "and then my boss says I can have the rest of the afternoon off. I'll harness Mr. Bony and ——"

"And we'll all go for a r-r-ride," Susan put in with an extra roll of her difficult consonant.

"I'm going to stay at home," Father hastened to say, "and I'd like to have someone take care of me and talk about—about chickens. We've got to have some new ones."

"I'll stay," volunteered Jim, who never had as much as he wanted of his father's society, and welcomed an occasional chance when the older ones were away.

"Do you think if I take care of you I might have some little yellow shickens all my own?" Susan bargained.

"We'll see. Anyway, you and Jimsey keep house with me this afternoon and we'll let these almost grown-uppers go off by themselves. I'm going to rest now, but when the others depart we'll have a secret council."

"Perhaps I ought to stay, too. I'm not so terribly grown-up—at least, the others don't think so," Connie suggested, doubtfully, but she flushed with

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pleasure at Rose's immediate, "Come along with us, Con. Of course we want you."

"I believe Roger would send us back if we left you, Connie," added Archie, and her delight was complete.

The girls helped to clear the table and wash the dishes, and it was while Rose was finishing her part of the work that a brilliant idea came to her.

"Oh, Nan," she said, bursting into the kitchen, where Anne was wiping dishes for Effie, and Connie was putting them away. "Oh, Nan," she began again, and paused to see if Susan were within hearing, for if that young person knew her plan there would be no peaceable way of keeping her at home. The coast being clear, she tried once more. "Don't you think we might put up a lunch and have an early supper over there?" Her voice was low and her eyes still travelled in search of Susan.

"Perfectly fine." Anne almost whispered, understanding at once the need of caution, and Connie whirled on one toe and clapped her hands soundlessly.

"I baked this mornin'," Effie remarked briefly. "I guess you'll find some things the boys'll like."

"Effie, you're a jewel." Rose gave her a quick hug, as much to her own surprise as to Effie's. "We'll have to hustle and pack the lunch before—

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before anyone appears. And you explain to Daddy, will you, Nan, and ask him if he minds?"

By the time Ellis went to get Mr. Bonaparte, Rose, ready a little before the others and waiting on the porch, was in the happiest frame of mind she had been in since leaving Melford. It colored the summer rosily to know that Archie and Roger were so easily within reach. Perhaps she should have a chance to drive their car. Anyway, it made her feel much less homesick, and she was quite prepared to have a glorious time this afternoon. To-day the queer old horse and the big unstylish carry-all seemed funny and comfortable to her. She rather wished Mr. Bonaparte would balk at a hill, and that Anne would have to get out and tempt him with sugar. How Archie would laugh! She hoped no one would tell him about it beforehand, and she started impulsively down the path to warn Ellis, who was just driving out of the barn.

When she reached the edge of the sidewalk, however, it was not the old horse she was confronting, but an automobile, which had come quite unperceived by her from the opposite direction, and was just stopping in front of the house.

CHAPTER X

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"DON'T tell me that you are all going away." Neil Ramsay's voice, keenly disappointed, came from the depths of the car, and his quick eye saw at once that Anne and Connie and a stranger were just appearing on the porch, while Ellis was approaching with Mr. Bonaparte.

"Can't I get anyone to play with me this afternoon?" he went on. "Miss Eunice sent the car around unexpectedly, and I'm to do an errand for her, and after that—what I please. Do let me take someone somewhere."

Nine times out of ten Rose would have jumped at the chance of an automobile ride, but this was the tenth time, when she was perversely anxious to do something entirely different. Before she could answer, Anne had joined them and was introducing Archie, and then Ellis left Mr. Bonaparte and came along to the automobile.

"I've been trying all the week to get over to see you," he said at once, stretching out a welcoming

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hand to the boy in the car. Ellis had a soft spot in his heart for anyone who was ill or helpless, and to-day he felt friendly and protective as he grasped Neil's hand. "Father and I have been up to our eyes in work, but just as soon as we can get Rose and Archie started"—Ellis paused long enough to grin at his sister and chum—"I'm going to sneak off and visit my neighbors."

"Not if we know it," said Rose, quick to notice that, contrary to his usual custom, Neil had no pleasant response ready. There was something in his eyes as he gazed at the two other boys that stirred her to sudden sympathy, and for the first time it seemed to her that his boyish face looked dejected.

"We're going about three miles to see Archie's camp," Anne explained. "Why can't you drive there after you've done your errand? And where's Ellen?"

"She looked like a shampoo advertisement when Miss Dean's message came, and she couldn't get her hair dry in time," Neil answered, trying to smile. "I wish I could take all of you in here, but you see with Hegan and the driver and these bundles Miss Eunice wants delivered there isn't much room. I thought perhaps one——" he left his sentence unfinished, but his gaze singled out Rose. "You didn't go the other day," he said frankly,

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“won’t you come along now? We can easily do the errand and get to the camping-place as soon as the others do. Then I could leave you there to ——”

“You must stay, too,” Archie put in heartily. “I’d tell your driver how to go if I knew, but I lost my way this morning and walked about twice as far as I needed to. Perhaps if I say that my uncle has bought adjoining farms, and that one of them is called Spear’s Oaks you’ll know just where it is.”

“Just about, and the chauffeur has lived around here all his life. We’ll get there—that is ——” he turned to Rose with a smile so eagerly appealing that she knew at once she could not refuse. And yet, now that it was impossible for her to go in the crowded carriage with the family, she wanted that privilege more than anything she could think of. Why hadn’t he asked Anne or Connie? Probably he would tease her again about his club. She should feel mean if she didn’t go. Unconsciously her hands gripped the edge of the car door until it hurt, and with the pang she was in the darkness of the well again, shaking with fright, and realizing for the first time in her life that she had always been trying to make things go to suit herself.

Thoughts are fleet in the thinking, and before Neil’s smile had lost its eagerness Rose was answer-

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ing in her nicest way. "Of course I'll come with you. Catch me going in the family ark when I have a chance for an automobile ride."

The boy's face brightened. "That's ripping of you," he said simply. "I'll do something for you some day."

"We'll see you later then," said Anne, and with Archie started toward the carriage, where Connie and Ellis were waiting for them.

"Oh, just a second, Nan." Rose went after her sister and pulled her to one side. "Oh, Anne," she began in a low voice, still keeping hold of her arm, "I ——" and then she realized blankly that she did not know what she wanted to say. "I—oh, you know I didn't mean it when I called your carriage an ark; it really looks awfully good to me to-day."

"Why, I didn't mind," responded Anne, looking at her in surprise. It was so like Rose to have called it that, and so unlike her to see any reason for apology that, for a moment, she was puzzled. Then her quick sympathy supplied the key. "It's dandy of you to go with him, Posy. I rather suspect you'd like to be with us," she said under her breath.

"Crazy to." Rose was so grateful for this appreciation of the situation that she felt like hugging Anne. "You see, I couldn't let him think I was

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making myself go," she mumbled; "and when he isn't smiling he seems such a deep dark blue."

Anne nodded, and this time it was her restraining hand which held her sister. "You're a trump, Posy," she murmured, and then, loud enough for the rest to hear, "that'll be all right; I think just as you do about it. If we get there first we'll tell them you're coming."

"Get there first!" repeated Rose as she stepped into the automobile, feeling all at once quite light-hearted, and firmly determined to raise the mental thermometer of the boy beside her. "I wouldn't insult Miss Dean's car by hinting that your fiery steed could beat it."

Mr. Bonaparte flicked an inquiring ear in her direction and, in spite of the fact that he was usually distinctly unwilling to leave home, pranced off at his most rapid pace almost before Ellis was ready for him.

"That old thing is positively weird," Rose said with a laugh as the car started. "I bet he'll keep the middle of the road so that we can't pass without running over them all."

"It would hurt me to have to do that, wouldn't it you?" responded Neil, looking as sober as if he had given voice to the most sensible question in the world. And then they both laughed, and Rose was

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sure the unseen thermometer had gone up a degree or two at a bound.

"We'll be leaving their road in a few minutes," Neil remarked, and then, "What's your friend's name? Bradford? I didn't quite get it."

"No, Bradley. Archibald Bradley, Junior, when we want to be very grand."

"I was just fancying that he looked something like a boy named Bradford in my prep. school. They always called him 'little Brad,' and there was a big Bradford, too. Now here's where we turn off and say farewell to the others. We're going to Mill Hollow to leave these bundles for Miss Dean."

"That's where Pete and Reddy live, isn't it? We haven't seen it yet. The neighbors said it wasn't a pretty road to take."

"It isn't. And it isn't a pretty place to see," Neil answered soberly. "But Miss Dean's got after it now and when she takes a hand there's something doing. This summer she's found a woman and her husband who are willing to live there and teach those foreign women how to take care of their children and their houses."

"Ugh! I should think they'd hate doing it," Rose said with an involuntary shudder. "I can't stand dirty sticky children."

"Miss Dean goes over herself as often as she

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can," Neil went on, "and Ellen is going to teach some of the girls to sew. That's what made me think about getting the boys together. If you start with one or two, you know, they're sure to bring in others."

"Tell me about Pete and Reddy," demanded Rose, forgetting her desire to avoid this subject. "Did Pete bring his nickel, and did Reddy 'clean hisself'?"

"They sure did—both of 'em," chuckled Neil, and Rose's inner self observed approvingly, "thermometer going up." "The nickel was so bright where Pete had scrubbed it on his trousers that I thought at first he was trying to palm off another one on me, but I remembered the date. And Reddy shone almost as much as the coin. He was a little cleaner than Pete, and he had a tired air as if Pete had taken a hand in polishing him." Neil was smiling over the recollection.

"Tell me what you did," urged Rose, feeling that this enlivening conversation must be continued. She was so absorbed that she had given scarcely a glance to the beautiful country through which they had been passing since they had turned from the main road, and had waved a good-bye to Mr. Bonaparte's family.

"Well, I can't say that we actually did much. We talked a little and got acquainted. But I'm

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afraid the party wouldn't have amounted to much if I hadn't thought to introduce Hegan to them, and put 'em on honor to see that none of the Mill Hollow boys did him any harm." Neil was speaking in a low tone so that Hegan, on the front seat, should not hear, and his eyes twinkled. "You should have seen him when I did that. He turned so red I was actually scared, but he never cracked a smile. Just looked at 'em as if he was really afraid they might not be good to him, and shook hands with them.

"And then he gave me the surprise of my young life," Neil went on quickly, "by hauling out two brand-new knives—pretending he had found 'em in his pocket—and he taught those kids the beginning of making a boat. Mind you, he spent his own money for the knives, which I thought was mighty good of him."

"I should say so," murmured Rose, contemplating Hegan's broad back with admiration. "I suppose they liked the ice-cream and ——"

"Did they! You should have seen them. Ellen baked little cakes and made the ice-cream, and Hegan froze it. You see, it wasn't really my party after all." Neil stopped, and a hint of bitterness stole into his face. "I thought I was going to do so much for them," he muttered, as if his self-dissatisfaction must come out, "and, after all, they

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wouldn't have had any use for me except for the ice-cream and Hegan's knives."

"Well, what did you expect?" Rose asked severely. "Didn't you always like the 'eats' best when you were small? Anyway, you started the others, and that's a good deal. You'll have to think up something specially interesting that will fit in with the knives and the ice-cream."

"Yes'm." Neil was meekness itself. "What would you suggest?"

"I said you'd have to think it up; I believe I could, though. Suppose you should tell them a story while they're making their boats, and each time stop at a terribly exciting place. Oh, I know that's old, but I bet it would work."

Neil looked at her approvingly, and some of his former enthusiasm was in the glance. "Help me hunt up a story, will you? There's a nice little library in the town."

"Oh, Anne's the reader in our family. She'd like to help you find ——"

"There you go again," interrupted Neil with a grin. "So self-forgetful. Always thinking of your family first. I shall ask Anne, and perhaps she'll tell me what I can get you to do."

"No, she won't; she'll do it herself. Anne isn't my kind," Rose answered shortly. Somehow, though she knew it was not intended, his words

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carried a sting. She was glad that the next moment the automobile made a sudden turn, thus giving her a chance to stop talking and look about her.

“Oh, is this Mill Hollow that we’re coming to now?” They were in a cleft between two hills, and the road was rapidly descending. “Why—why, we seem to be leaving the sunshine behind us,” she said with an involuntary shiver.

“It would seem so, in more ways than one, if you knew more about it,” answered Neil. “You see, someone owned this land who didn’t mind what happened to it so long as he could make money. And he sold it to men who put mills here, and brought a lot of foreign workmen without caring in the least how they live.”

It was truly a hollow, Rose decided as she gazed, and the wonderful hills seemed to frame it frowningly instead of protectingly. It was a fact that the people living in it could not have as much sunshine as they needed, for even now, scarcely past the middle of the afternoon, the sun seemed nearly ready to drop behind one of the hills. The two mill buildings looked in good repair, but the houses needed paint and repairing, and had the air of being forlornly conscious of their deficiencies. The one nearest to them as they approached the little settlement was built after the pattern of the others,

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but shone in the radiance of fresh paint, and had the appearance of being cared for.

"Someone," said Rose with a sigh of relief, "someone seems to be trying to make things a little better."

"That's the house we're going to—where Mr. and Mrs. Rand live. They've made all that improvement themselves."

As they stopped before the house, a youngish woman, whose face Rose liked at once, came out to the car. "Oh, Mr. Neil," she said, pleasantly acknowledging the introduction to his companion, "I'm so thankful to have those bundles of material. Ten women have promised to come this afternoon and seven are already here, and I was so afraid things would give out. I wish I might ask you to come in, Miss Sheldon," she went on, turning to Rose, "but you see I want them to feel that this is just a neighborly affair, and that they're not to be looked at by strangers."

Rose smiled and nodded understandingly, at the same time feeling that they couldn't possibly dislike having her look at them more than she should hate to do it. Just this one small corner of Mill Hollow, this clean little house with its neat yard and the beginning of a garden, looked as if human beings might live in it. The other untidy houses, the slatternly women poking unkempt heads out of

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the windows, the dirty children, filled her with horror.

A group of girls drew her gaze, and she singled out particularly one whose dark eyes seemed to compel her own. The child wore a skirt that came to her ankles and was fringed into rags around the bottom, where it disclosed shoes much too large for her. A soiled waist, torn and gaping, hung loosely, and was partly concealed by a tangled mass of black hair. At first glance her face seemed sad, and she was intensely absorbed in her scrutiny of Rose. Then, with a quick movement, she flung back her untidy hair, laughed shrilly, and scampered off with the others at her heels.

"Do let's hurry," Rose said with a shudder, turning appealingly to Neil as Mrs. Rand went back into the house to superintend the disposal of the packages. "Isn't this the most awful place? Why do they let these people live here like this?"

"We'll have to wait a few minutes," Neil answered, "because Mr. Rand wants help in moving some heavy furniture. That's why I brought Hegan. You see," he explained, "the town can't exactly turn these people out. So Miss Dean and some others are trying to make the place better for them. And, by Jinks, I believe they're accomplishing something. Do you see that?" He was

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pointing excitedly; "see where somebody's begun to dig in the yard next to Mrs. Rand's? I bet he's caught the garden fever. I must tell that to Miss Eunice."

Turning to look, Rose saw nothing of what Neil was pointing out, but gazed instead at the dark-haired girl, who had come stealthily around from behind the car, and was staring at Rose as if she had never seen anything like her. As Rose turned, the child drew a deep breath and murmured something quite unintelligible; her eyes, black and sparkling, were more understandable, and seemed to say that it was beyond comprehension that anyone could be so beautiful as the vision in the automobile seemed to her.

"What is it, Lissy? What do you want?" asked Mrs. Rand, who had come up behind her unobserved.

The girl whipped around in a flash, made an impish face at sight of Mrs. Rand, turned for one more yearning look at Rose, and was off so swiftly that their eyes lost her almost at once.

"That's a queer girl," commented Mrs. Rand. "I haven't been able to get at her yet. She either makes life miserable for the other children or else fascinates them so that they do whatever she says. You saw how she looked at me. That's usually what I get, but the other day she found a flower,

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apparently one she hadn't seen before, and she came with tears in her eyes to point out its beauties to me. And the next time I met her she made the worst face I had ever seen." Mrs. Rand ended with a jolly laugh and a determined nod. "I'll find the way to the girl inside of her some day, see if I don't."

"Of course you will," Neil said admiringly, and then, "She seemed to think Miss Rose about the finest thing she's seen up to date."

Rose flushed. "It surprised me so to find her there that I couldn't do anything but stare. I wish I had smiled at her," she said with regret, and then was afraid it was a foolish thing to say.

Mrs. Rand did not seem to think so, however. "Make us a special visit and smile at Lissy," she suggested, and would have said more, but Hegan and the driver came back at that moment, and she hastily gave Neil a message for Miss Dean.

Rose breathed a sigh of relief as the car hurried them along on the road toward the sunshine. It would take more than smiles, she was thinking, to have any effect in a place like this. She hoped fervently that she should never have to go there again. The wish seemed cowardly to her, even as she made it, but she could not help feeling that way. Some persons, she decided, didn't mind those things as much as she did. "Oh, fudge, that's an 'Aunt-

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Harrietism ' of the worst kind," her inner mind put in with such distinctness that it seemed almost as if her companion might hear it, too.

"Tough, isn't it?" Neil said in belated answer to her sigh. He also had been busy with his thoughts. "That's why Ellen and I are anxious to get hold of the children. If we can only give them a boost——" he left his sentence unfinished as if sure that Rose would understand.

"My, but it seems good to be out of that shut-in place," she said, as the car swept up the hill and after a little turned in a new direction. "I never supposed these farms and these nice clean houses could look so—so perfectly sweet to me." There was a quaver in her voice which she deeply resented, but could not prevent, and she sat up very straight and tried to shut from her mind everything but the pleasant country through which they were going. After a while she realized that Neil seemed strangely quiet, and was nervously clenching his hands.

"Do you—do you expect to stay long at your friend's camp?" he asked suddenly.

"Well, it's a secret from the other boys, but I'll tell you." Rose was so glad to have something pleasant to think of that she fairly beamed at him. "We tucked a basket of good things into the carriage without letting even Ellis know, and we're

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going to have our supper at the camp. Don't you think it will be fun?"

Neil looked more worried than pleased. "Awfully jolly, of course," he said after a moment, but his troubled face made the words unconvincing. "You see, I have a message to give to Miss Dean, and—and I'm not much good at picnic suppers nowadays. I think, if you don't mind, I'd better just—just go home before the others get here." He managed to smile, but it was a queer, twisted smile which Rose could scarcely bear to see, and which made her long desperately to set things right for him.

"Oh, but I do mind," she began. "The boys will be crazy to ask you about the best drives around here, and about fishing and—and hiking." It did not need his quick shrug to make her see that she was not bettering the situation. "I should think you might stay," she went on pleadingly. "I want you to meet Roger and Mr. Pearson. They are ——"

"Great Scott! More ——" broke in Neil, and was himself interrupted, because just then the car made a sudden turn into the driveway leading to a small house, and came to a standstill in front of the porch.

"Why, this can't be the place," Rose said in dismay. "I was sure they had tents ——" and then

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it occurred to her that she had no reason to be so decided about it, for Archie had mentioned neither tent nor house.

"Those trees off there," said the chauffeur, pointing to a wooded knoll some little distance away, "are what they call Spear's Oaks, and this is the farm they belong to. It don't look much as if folks was to home, though. I'll go 'round the back and see if I can find anyone." Hegan followed as the driver got out of the car and they both disappeared.

"Isn't it polite in this part of the world to go to the front door?" Rose asked, looking puzzled.

Before Neil could answer the two men came back again. "Nobody there. I knocked two or three times," reported the chauffeur.

Rose jumped out of the car. "I'm going to try the front door," she said, and took a step in that direction. Then she turned to Neil. "If the door is open I'm going in," she asserted boldly. "If I go out of sight of you—you won't slip off and leave me, will you?"

"What do you take me for? I should say I wouldn't. Besides, I couldn't just at this moment." He pointed to Hegan and Fred, who had walked a short distance away, and with their backs to the automobile were gazing at the farm-lands.

"All right, then. So long as you can't, I'll

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trust you," Rose replied saucily. "Now watch me!"

She went up on the porch feeling all the while that some stranger must surely appear and demand her errand. Her first knock met with no response, and her second, a bolder one this time, was no more successful. Then she cautiously tried the door.

"It's not locked. If I get taken up for breaking into a house will you stand up for me?" she called back, and without waiting for an answer, opened the door softly and stepped inside.

The front hall was small with two doors opening from it, and Rose half-expected that some indignant person would issue from one of the rooms or come down the narrow stairway which confronted her. She waited a moment, then, as no one appeared, she went to the doorway of the room on the left. In it was a sagging sofa, shiny and slippery in its haircloth covering; a tall stove, cold and uninviting; a chair or two, and a dingy carpet, which once, perhaps, was resplendent. The chill primness of it all affronted her, and she turned quickly to the other side of the hall.

As she poked her head through the doorway of the right-hand room, her first glance fell on a capacious couch, on which a boy was sleeping with his face turned away, and only a curly dark head to tell her who he was.

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Before she could speak he rolled over, yawned, opened his eyes to stare at her sleepily, and then, in a trice, was on his feet, limping toward her, and looking as if he scarcely believed she were real.

"Hello, Roger Bradley," Rose said promptly. "You'd better wake up; you're going to have a party."

Roger smiled at her, blinking in spite of himself; then, as an afterthought, he shook hands. He was a little older than Rose, but with his tousled hair and sleep-filled eyes he looked younger.

"Say, you just pulled me right out of a dream," he murmured, swallowing a yawn. "Did—did anyone knock?"

"Not more than three persons, so far as I know," Rose answered with perfect seriousness, though her eyes laughed.

"That's one on me all right. I dreamed someone was knocking, and that it was someone I wanted to see awfully, but I hated like mischief to get up, and ——" another yawn obscured the rest of it. "Wait a sec," he muttered, and disappeared into an adjoining room, from whence, a moment later, came the sound of running water and a vigorous splashing.

"There, now I can really see you," he grinned, coming back with his face glowing, and his hair sprinkled with water. "Before, you looked large

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and dim and—and wavy, you know. How did you get here, and where are the other Sheldons?”

“On the way—some of them. I came in an automobile, and they are driving a slow-poke of a horse. They’ll be here soon. Come out and meet the boy in the car.”

Almost at the front door Rose turned so abruptly that she just missed stepping on Roger. “He’s had an accident—he can’t walk at all, Roger. I thought I ought to tell you,” she said under her breath, and the next moment they were out on the porch.

CHAPTER XI

LITTLE BRAD

"NEIL, this is ——" Rose began, but the words were taken out of her mouth by Roger's sudden jump to the running-board, and his cry of "Ramsay! Well, Ramsay, I never dreamed of anything so fine as seeing you."

"It is little Brad, after all," said Neil, smiling and flushing under the younger boy's admiring gaze. "I thought all the time your name was Bradford, youngster. Stupid of me to make such a mistake."

"Well, of course, you didn't know me so well as I—as I knew about you," Roger went on, shaking hands all over again in his joy. "Great Scott! I wish Arch would get here, and that Mr. Pearson would come back. He's gone for a walk and he told me to rest my foot. We've sure got to have some kind of a celebration now that Ramsay's here."

"Will you listen to that!" Rose exclaimed. "How about the Sheldons, I should like to know?"

"Oh, of course, they're all right," grinned Roger,

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not at all abashed. "They can celebrate, too. But this is 'Ram.'" He paused and looked at the older boy as if not quite certain whether it would do for him to use the nickname, then went on. "Ramsay was king-pin at prep. school, you know."

"It's all very well to say 'you know,' but how should I?" Rose retorted. "You were as mum as an oyster about school. I didn't suppose you liked anyone there, nor ——"

"There was always Ramsay," Roger interrupted, smiling at her. "Go on, Rose, I like to see you get excited. Oh, I say, isn't that the carriage coming now? Yes, sir, I see Anne," and he was off to meet them, limping as he ran.

Neil looked relieved, Rose thought. She fancied it had been hard for him to stand this talk about school, and she was glad the others were coming.

"Little Brad was the forlornest youngster you could imagine. I used to feel sorry for him," said Neil when Roger was out of hearing. "I never saw such a change in a boy. I suppose he would say the same about me, though."

"He seems to think you're something pretty fine."

"He's thinking of what I was—not what I am now," the boy answered bitterly, and looked so dejected that Rose's hopes as to a permanent rise in the thermometer went all to smash. It was a relief

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just then to find Ellis at her shoulder, chuckling over Mr. Bonaparte's queer actions.

"The old thing balked at every hill we came to," he said to Neil. "I think his feelings were hurt because he couldn't keep your car behind him all the way."

Archie, coming along at this moment, shook hands again with Neil. "My kid brother thinks I should have known at once that you are the Ramsay he's always talking about," he said heartily. "Look at him now tearing off to meet Mr. Pearson and tell him you're here."

"I had no idea he had ever thought twice about me," Neil answered, "but I'm mighty glad to find him again. I always liked little Brad." He was making an evident effort to speak heartily, too, but Rose, standing near, wondered if it made him more unhappy to be with these strong, active boys. A moment later, Archie and Ellis having moved away, she saw that he wanted to say something to her, and she went close to the automobile.

"Would you—would you mind if I should leave you here?" he asked, trying to smile. "I know it isn't very polite but ——" he stopped and gave up the smile as a bad job. "I just can't stand it," he said abruptly. "This is the first time I've been with boys my size since ——" he paused again and then went on disjointedly. "It's been a bad day for

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me—didn't sleep any last night—I was all in when Miss Dean sent the car, but Ellen thought it would make me feel better, so I came. I—I think you'll have to help me make a getaway."

Rose had been thinking fast all the time Neil had been talking. She mustn't tell him how sorry she felt for him—that was out of the question. She could of course make excuses for him to the others and let him go home directly. Perhaps she should have to do that in the end, but there was a bigger purpose tugging at her mind: she wanted to try to help him fight this feeling—she hated to have him give up to it and go away.

"I do mind and I'm awfully disappointed," she began, feeling her way. "We're only going to stay until about seven o'clock. Don't you think you could manage to put up with us till that time?"

Neil looked relieved. "I'm afraid I ought not to keep Miss Dean's car so long as that," he said decidedly, "and Ellen expects me for supper; she might be anxious." He brightened visibly with two such good reasons at his command.

Rose hung on tenaciously. "Let's send over and get Ellen," she proposed. "Her hair will be dry by this time. And then the chauffeur can ask Miss Dean if he may come back for you at seven. I know she'll let him."

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Neil knew she would, too. And it would be good fun for Ellen to come.

"The boys can whisk that couch out on the porch for you in a jiffy," Rose pleaded. "We're not going to do anything but sit around and talk and eat." She laughed suddenly. "If you get away from me there'll be little Brad to settle with. I can see him coming with Mr. Pearson."

Neil looked worried, and she hurried on. Another argument had occurred to her—it frightened her to think of using it—but it came out in her bluntest manner. "I don't see," she said doubtfully, "I don't see how you're going to help other people get over their troubles, if you can't fight your own." And then she realized that her cheeks were hot and her hands cold and her throat dry. It had taken courage to say that. She could read in Neil's face that he was astonished, hurt—thank goodness, he was a little angry, too; that made her feel better. She hoped he would say something crushing in return, and then she could go on arguing. But if he were meek or pathetic ——

"I'll stay," he said with a sort of frosty stiffness. "I'll have Hegan put me on the couch before he goes for Ellen."

From that moment Rose had a new respect for boys, not only because Neil was doing just what she thought he ought to do, but because Ellis and

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Archie played up so beautifully. As soon as she suggested it, the old couch, on which Roger had been sleeping, was moved to the pleasantest corner of the porch. In the clear afternoon light it looked shabby and humbly aware of its general humpiness, and Archie surveyed it with dissatisfaction.

"Hold on a minute," he said, rushing into the house, and flinging back the vague information that he'd "fix it." In a few minutes he was back with a thin, narrow mattress which he laid over the hills and valleys of the old couch. Over this he spread a Navajo blanket, and then beamed at the group around him.

"Quite a fancy little couch—what?" he demanded with a pleased smile. "I brought that blanket with me thinking it might come in handy. I've got some cushions stuffed in the same trunk." He was off and back again in an unbelievably short time with some pillows covered with gay cretonnes.

"Talk about getting ready for company in a hurry," he remarked with an air of pride. "I think I'm some little wizard at that."

"I never saw any wizard so conceited as you are," Rose observed with crushing promptness, and then softened her remark with, "You did that rather well, though."

"Thanks, lady. Once in a while you fling a kind word at me, don't you? Say, this corner of the

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porch isn't so bad now, is it? We'll have more chairs here as soon as we get Ramsay settled on his throne." He turned to smile at Neil, who had been watching proceedings with interest.

"I'll tell Hegan we're ready," offered Connie, but Ellis stopped her. "Come on, Arch," he said under his breath, then swung himself over the porch railing, and the next moment was at the side of the automobile.

"Let Archie and me carry you, won't you, Neil?" he begged. "We want to have good times together this summer, and you may as well get used to having us tote you 'round."

For a moment Neil looked blankly opposed to this proposal, and Hegan, who had come back to the automobile, shook his head soberly.

"Is there any trick about it? Are we likely to hurt you?" Ellis persisted, much to the surprise of his sisters. Somehow he had got it into his head that if he and Archie could do this it would bring Neil into closer partnership at once, and, perhaps, take away that unhappy look. Since he had been so anxious about his father, Ellis had begun to think of things like this.

"No, you won't hurt me. We might let 'em try it, Hegan," Neil answered, and the big man stepped aside, not very willingly it seemed.

To Rose's joy, the two boys managed it as if

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they'd been doing such things all their lives, and deposited Neil so gently on the old sofa that even Hegan, who was following anxiously, looked satisfied.

"Now, Hegan, you're to bring Miss Ellen, and you know what to say to Miss Dean about Mill Hollow," Neil said, looking happier already. "And, of course, if she wants her car for anything I'll go home whenever you can get back here for me." His face sobered as he voiced this last; even so soon as this he had begun to feel the atmosphere of comradeship and jollity, and he wanted to stay.

"No! No! We won't let you go," protested Ellis.

"Archie can patch up the flivver and take you over if it comes to that," said Roger, and dropped down on the porch in front of the couch, as if he would bar its occupant from leaving.

The others grouped themselves, some on the floor, some on the porch railing; Anne and Mr. Pearson, who looked as friendly and smiling as she remembered him, rejoiced in the comfort of chairs. Rose settled down as far away from the sofa as she could get and still be a part of the circle. In spite of the fact that Neil looked so contented she wasn't sure that he had forgiven her for trying to manage him, and she preferred to keep out of his way for a while.

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Something suggested to Archie an adventure they had had during their cruise in the *Alice Bell*, and he told it with frequent interruptions from Roger.

"Say, kid, you tell a better one if you know how," Archie said good-naturedly as he finished his story. "You've pretty well spoiled mine."

Roger, who was a born teller of tales, frowned impatiently. "You left out so many little points that made it exciting," he explained. "I suppose I did keep jumping in—but, say, that reminds me of the time you and I got lost. I'll tell that and you may stop me if you like."

But neither Archie nor anyone else wanted to interrupt this story, for Roger held them breathless, made them shiver, and finally disposed of a real mystery by bringing it out so that the laugh came on both his brother and himself.

"There's every word true," Archie declared. "I hoped he was going to embroider it a little so that I could call him down. Would you ever believe I was such a chump as to get taken in that way?"

"Oh, I don't know," Anne answered thoughtfully, and then looked aghast at Ellis' roar of laughter. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded. That was really mysterious, and anyone might have been fooled by it—even Archie."

"'Even Archie'! Now will you be good after

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such a compliment as that?" demanded Rose. "Oh, I'd like to go off and have adventures! Can't you tell us one, Mr. Pearson?"

"I could—some day I will, but I just caught a glimpse of an automobile, and I think Miss Ramsay must be coming."

"There it is," said Connie. "After they've passed that clump of trees you'll see them. I saw Ellen."

"Good! That means Neil can stay," exulted Roger. "Of course she wouldn't come just to go back again."

"Well, if you knew Miss Eunice you'd be sure she'd send her car if she possibly could," Rose said, and then, realizing that she had not always felt in this way about Miss Dean, she glanced from Anne to Ellis to see if they were laughing at her. They were only looking eagerly for Ellen, and she assured herself that it wouldn't have troubled her if they did think her changeable—about this.

Out from behind the clump of trees came the automobile, then swiftly along a level stretch of road, and at last, with a fine sweep, up the short rise which led to the house.

"Makes me think of the way Mr. Bony goes up a hill," chuckled Ellis, hurrying to take a package Ellen was holding.

"Will you be very careful of it?" she demanded

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before giving it up. "It's my latest attempt at a cake; I thought it would be good for supper."

"I'll walk on my tiptoes," promised Ellis, and turning too quickly, so tangled his feet that he barely saved himself from falling. "Great Scott! Do you suppose I juggled it too much?" Then, looking down, "I ought to have tracks for my feet to run on," he muttered disgustedly. "Great, clumsy things!"

"Don't scold them so long as they'll move when you want them to," Ellen said under her breath. And then, before any of the others reached them, "Hegan told me how you teased Neil into letting you carry him. Hegan didn't like it, of course, but I understood, and I think it was fine."

"I—I thought it would make him feel as if—as if he belonged to the gang," stammered Ellis, even in the midst of his embarrassment deciding that this girl was the right sort, and that he wanted to do a lot more to help her about her brother. He would have liked to tell her so, but he didn't know how to say it, and anyway the others were too near now.

It being half-past five they decided to have supper at once. Ellen unwrapped her cake cautiously, hoping that Ellis' tiptoe dance had not damaged it. It was a large round cake, frosted with chocolate, and with dabs of marshmallow studding its smooth brown surface.

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"Do you mean to say you made that?" questioned Ellis in an awestruck tone, immediately sitting down beside her. "You had to button on that chocolate with those dinky white buttons, didn't you? I always thought I should like to begin my supper with a cake like that."

"You've got another think coming," Rose declared. A table had been brought from the house and put within reach of the sofa, and she and Anne were unpacking their basket. "We didn't plan ahead for this party, so you'll have to be thankful for what you get," she went on. "Of course there are hard-boiled eggs; it wouldn't be a picnic without those."

"There are fresh cookies—two kinds; and if you don't want eggs here are thin slices of ham," remarked Anne, and added with a laugh, "we had to slice it thin."

"Mayn't we have both?" Roger asked eagerly. "Mr. Pearson and I didn't invite ourselves out to dinner the way Arch did."

"Food does look pretty good to us, doesn't it, Roger? You see our supplies are slow in coming," Mr. Pearson explained, "and Archie went off so unexpectedly this morning that I didn't have a chance to tell him to lay in a stock at the store. So this party happens just at the right time."

"I move that the Sheldons and the Ramsays each

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give up something, and then there'll be enough left for breakfast at Camp Bradley," suggested Neil. "I'll contribute two hard-boiled eggs."

"How noble of him—he doesn't eat eggs," murmured his sister, who was hugging to herself the knowledge that Neil looked happier than he had in a long time.

"I'll do without everything but the cake with white buttons on it; if you'll let me have enough of that to make up," Ellis offered. "That ought not to be left, anyway, because it isn't proper to have cake for breakfast."

"Don't want it," retorted Archie. "At least I don't want it until I've had my first course."

"You may have my piece if there isn't enough to go 'round," Connie promised, passing Archie another biscuit. "Don't you hurry; you eat all of the first part you want, and I'll see that you get some cake."

"Connie! I'm your best friend in this family. Are you going back on me that way?" Roger was pathetic in tone and expression.

"Don't you worry, my dear; I've kept back two pieces," Connie explained in her motherly fashion. "You see I was afraid that if it didn't hold out you and Archie would think you must refuse, because the party's at your house."

"Say, Connie! I wish you wouldn't expect so

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much of your friends." Archie stopped eating for as much as a minute and looked aggrieved. "I haven't got used to this place yet—it didn't occur to me that this is our party, and—and the air makes us awfully hungry."

"It isn't your party; you're just providing the porch," Anne said consolingly. "Have another egg."

"Nan, you and Connie are too gentle with those boys. You'll spoil them," scolded Rose. "You ought to expect more of them—brace 'em up." She was passing cookies, piled dangerously high on a wooden plate, and she reached the sofa just as she spoke the last words.

"That's your specialty, isn't it? Being a bracer, I mean," inquired the occupant of the sofa meaningly, and surprised by the question, Rose looked down to find him regarding her with the old friendly grin. In her embarrassment she tilted the plate and showered cookies over the questioner.

"You're wasting 'em," complained Roger, deftly catching two or three. "Talk about spoiling people. What do you call that?"

"My fault," Neil declared promptly. "I bothered the lady. You haven't come out badly on the deal, little Brad."

"No," admitted Roger, finishing the last cookie with obvious effort, and looking absurdly sorrowful

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over his diminishing capacity. "I'm afraid I really can't eat another thing."

"Well, that's good," Anne began, "I mean I'm glad there will be something left for your breakfast. I was beginning to be afraid ——"

"That our neighbors would have to invite us after all?" questioned Archie with a laugh. "Not on your life. I'm going to be a model to-morrow—get up bright and early—clean the car and drive over to that nice store you pointed out to me this afternoon. I admit I was a slacker to-day."

"No one can be good all the time." Connie came quickly to the defense, and couldn't understand why they all laughed.

"Oh, Connie, I'm in luck to have such a friend as you are," Archie said, and her ruffled feelings were soothed at once. "Let's walk over to the Oaks—some of us," he went on. "I want to show you what we think will be a great place for Uncle to build his house."

"Count me out," drawled Ellis. "I'm mighty thankful to sit still. Gardening isn't all it's cracked up to be. At least it's no rest-cure." He pulled a chair over to the couch and settled himself with an air of enjoyment. "Go on, you others, and don't feel obliged to hurry back. Neil and I can get along without you."

Roger was torn between his desire to stay with

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Neil and his eagerness to go with the others. As they started off he walked along with Rose and began to talk at once in a confidential tone. "Say, Rose, did you ever hear how Ram got hurt?" he asked.

"It happened at school; last spring, Miss Dean said. She didn't tell us very much, because Neil won't say anything, and Ellen can't bear to talk about it."

"Well, I know more than that. It was after I left, but a boy I met in New York told me about it. There was a fire in one of the buildings at night, and Ram went up a ladder to get a boy who was afraid to jump into the thing they were holding for him. The boy was just about out of his mind, and Ram had to carry him. And on the ladder he struggled and"—Roger took a long breath and went on—"well, they both fell, and the boy was hardly hurt at all, but Ram——"

Rose shivered in sympathy. "But they do think he's going to get well some time," she said quickly. "Miss Dean told Father that the doctors believe he can be cured by an operation. Probably it'll be this summer; they're waiting for some doctor who is a friend of theirs."

"So that's what he's got to think about while the rest of us are having a good time." Roger walked along for a few steps in silence. "I—I guess I'll

go back," he decided, and then, as if he were afraid Rose might suspect some generous impulse on his part, "I forgot Mr. Pearson told me not to walk much to-day."

"All right; we shall all be back before long." Rose followed on after the others with her mind aflame. She had thought before that Neil was a hero and now she was sure of it. She instantly pledged herself to do anything for his club that he wanted her to do. She could teach them basketball and hockey, she supposed, and if she didn't have patience, why—she must grow some. She was a little vague as to what might be expected of her, but she was so anxious to assure Neil of her entire readiness to help that she half turned to run after Roger. But by now she had almost reached the others, and the little hill with its clustering oak-trees was near.

"Isn't this a great old view?" demanded Archie a few moments later. "We think that to clear out some of the trees and put a house on this knoll would be fine."

"Perfectly splendid," Anne responded. "You'd get a glorious view and nothing could shut you in."

The others chatted and laughed, but to Rose, in sharp contrast to the loveliness before her eyes, came the memory of the swiftly descending road that led between the frowning hills to Mill Hollow,

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and in a quick vision she saw again the dirt and desolation at the end of it. Here, with green fields stretching into the distance, beautiful in the soft shadows of the early evening, she could scarcely believe the other place existed; she wished she could forget it.

On the way back she made up her mind to tell Neil her decision about the club as soon as she reached the house, but Ellis and Roger were still with him, and Archie and Mr. Pearson joined the group at once. Watching them as they talked together so absorbedly she grew impatient. "I knew him before any of them did except Roger," she said to herself with some irritation, "and now he'll probably like them all better than he does me. I don't believe I'll say anything about the club, after all."

Ellen coming up beside her squeezed her arm. "You're watching Neil with the boys. Isn't it wonderful?" she exulted. "This is the first time I've seen him look really happy since—since his accident." She hurried the last words as though it were somehow a relief to be open about the whole dreadful business. "And this afternoon when he started out he was the bluest thing I ever saw. I was so afraid he couldn't get any of you to go with him."

Rose, remembering that she had wanted to re-

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fuse, rejoiced that she hadn't. "I'm glad he's happier," she said. "The boys think he's fine. I can't get a word in."

"Boys always have," the little sister added with a proud tilt of her head. "They ——" of a sudden she dabbed her eyes with her small fists and laughed waveringly. "See what a silly I am," she said appealingly, and Rose, the unsentimental, thought her blue eyes looked like violets.

"I—I can't talk about Neil," Ellen went on. "He and I are the only ones left of our family, and this has been such a terrible trouble to both of us. But there really is hope—and all of you are going to do him heaps of good."

"We'd like to," Rose answered eagerly, and made up her mind again that she would give her promise as to the club. But she did not want to speak of it before the others, and no good chance came until just as they reached home. Then Ellen, who had been riding in Mr. Bonaparte's carriage, had to change to the car, and while that was going on Rose found an opportunity for a few words with Neil.

"Oh, Neil," she said quickly, "I'm really going to do what you've been asking me; about the club, I mean. I'll be"—she laughed over the idea, but kept on—"I'll be director of athletics, or—or any old thing you like."

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"Fine!" answered Neil, and if there were any hesitation in his manner it was too slight for Rose to think of it until afterwards. "I bet that club will be a winner. Ellis and Archie are awfully interested; Roger vows he'll do anything I say, and Mr. Pearson has some great ideas about it. We shall be tickled to death to have you help, too."

"Oh," murmured Rose blankly, feeling that to be at the end of a list like that was not what she had counted on. For an instant she was strongly resentful. Hadn't he teased her time after time to do this very thing, and now that she was ready he—she must say something quickly or he would guess that her feelings—but her feelings weren't hurt. She was glad—very glad that things had come out just this way.

"That's very nice," she heard herself announcing with emphasis. It sounded so real to her that she hoped Neil wouldn't miss anything. "It'll be perfectly fine for those boys to get busy over something of this kind. I'm awfully glad you went with us this afternoon, Neil. Good-bye." Then she slipped away before he had time to answer.

Until bedtime, which came early because they were all tired, Rose went around with the haunting consciousness that she had lost something, and worse still she had lost it through her own fault. That was the point to which her thoughts always

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returned, though there were meditative flights in which she felt that Neil should have consulted her before asking all these others; that probably now he didn't want her, but was too polite to say so; that it really was rather mean of him to be so changeable.

At the moment of turning out her light to get into bed, she decided that she never would let him know that she had any unpleasant feeling about the matter; if he wanted her to do anything she would quietly slide out of it in some way. Or, if she couldn't escape, she would do it so—so gloriously that he would always be sorry that he hadn't trusted the whole thing to her.

It was, perhaps, this lofty vision which proved too much for her straightforward mind and made her see the funny side of it all, for as she lay there in the dark, gazing out of her window into starlit spaces, she suddenly chuckled. "You thought you were going to be the whole thing, didn't you, Rose Sheldon?" she said to herself, and then, with another laugh which somehow left her at peace with Neil, and perfectly serene, "Did you ever get left?"

CHAPTER XII

LISSY INTRODUCES HERSELF

“Now, Juno, you stop pecking at Minerva and Venus. They’re not doing a thing to you.” Connie, who had been feeding the hens, was now concerning herself with their table-manners which were not of the best. “Don’t be so greedy.” Then, as the aforesaid Juno administered a sharp tap of her beak on the head of one of her sisters—“Stop it! You can’t run things here the way you tried to on Mount Olympus. You were always making trouble for someone there.”

“For pity’s sake, Con, where did you learn so much about Mount Olympus?” demanded Rose, who had come out of the back door just in time to hear her sister’s remarks.

“School,” Connie answered briefly, her attention still fixed on the trouble-making Juno. “Miss Hawley used to read to us about the gods and goddesses, and she let me take the book when I got my lessons ready before the others did. I think Mythology is a fascinating study.”

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"You can have it; it doesn't fascinate me so's you'd notice it. Have you named them all that way?"

"Not yet. The big rooster is Jupiter, and this other one is Apollo—his voice is more musical, and you know he was the god of music—Apollo was, I mean."

Rose laughed. "I didn't think you meant the rooster. What's this one?" She pointed to a smooth and shining little hen who was doing her best to get her share of breakfast, and at the same time keep beyond the reach of Juno's merciless beak.

"That's Venus. Isn't she a darling? I named her that because she's beautiful. And see what a knowing-looking one this is. She's so wise I called her Minerva. She and Venus are my special pets. Sometime I'll show you their tricks."

"All right, do. I'm going out now to get the asparagus for dinner, and then I'm going to weed the strawberry bed." Rose felt as pleasant as the June morning, and so helpful and so much like work that every little while she was tempted to pinch herself to see if she were awake or dreaming all this. Five busy days had slipped by since the arrival of the Bradleys, and by this time Rose's hands were well again, and she had become a full-fledged worker in the garden.

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This morning the feeling of unreality had again come to her strongly, and it seemed that she really couldn't be the same girl who had so hated the thought of coming to Brookfield. A fleeting memory danced through her mind and made her smile.

"Do you remember, Con, the story Mother used to tell us about the little old woman who wasn't sure she was herself, and kept saying that if her little dog were only there he would know? I suppose you wouldn't remember, though; you were so little."

"Yes, I do," insisted Connie. "I remember that very story. At least, I think I do. I've read it so many times I can't be quite sure." She hated to give up any memory of her mother that anyone else had, but she was honest to the last degree. "What made you think of it, anyway?"

"Oh, I don't know," Rose answered vaguely, at the same time telling herself that she did know, but that it would not be easy to explain to anyone else. "I was always crazy about Mother's stories—about everything she did." Her tone was wistful. "I shall never forget one least little thing about her."

"Neither shall I; though, of course, you can remember lots more," answered Connie in all humility.

"Of course." Rose sighed unconsciously. "I

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was named for her, but you look like her, Connie, and you do seem like her lots of times." Which was a great concession on Rose's part, as she had never before been willing to admit that anyone in the family resembled her mother. "Well, I'm off," she said, and then still lingered, looking over the garden which held such promise of beauty, at the glossy hens, greedily picking up the last of their breakfast, at Connie, herself, serenely watching with that motherly expression her face so often wore.

"Wouldn't you think it would hurt their—their noses to tap them so hard in the pan?" demanded Connie, her face crinkling into a laugh. "Ouch! It hurts my nose even to think of it."

"That's the trouble with having too much imagination. You and Anne ——"

"Where is Anne?" Connie interrupted. She had heard something like this before, and she could make a pretty good guess as to what the rest of it would be.

"Up-stairs—studying." Rose's tone expressed her opinion of anyone who could stay in and study on a morning like this. "Can you beat it?"

"Well"—began Connie, at once on the defensive—"she thinks if she works this summer she may be able to go on with her class, and the doctor told her she might study, you know."

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"I know it. Catch me asking him. Probably it's lucky we're not all alike. Well, bye-bye." Rose strode off along a narrow path, erect, slender, strongly poised, with her golden hair glinting in the sunshine.

Connie's eyes followed her admiringly. There were times when she yearned to look like Rose, and wished that she herself were not so plump. Perhaps if she did not eat quite so much—she gazed at her sister trying to get hold of a haunting suggestion.

"I know," she said out loud a moment later, "if she had a bow and arrow she'd look like Diana—I mean the way Diana seems to me. I shouldn't dare tell her, though."

The sudden slam of a screen door made her look back at the house to see Roger Bradley coming out.

"Hello, Roger," she called, her eyes wide with surprise. "How did you get here so early? I thought you had lessons in the morning."

"Sh! Don't mention it. That's what Mr. Pearson thinks, too. I—I slid out, grabbed my wheel, and—and here I am."

"Do you mean he doesn't know where you've gone?" Connie was looking at him soberly and, though she did not realize it, there was disapproval in her clear gaze.

"Oh, he can guess all right." Roger's eyes were

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searching the garden for the other members of the family. Connie's large-eyed, serious gaze made him uncomfortable, and he fancied he should get on better with Rose. It occurred to him that this morning he should prefer her even to Anne, though ordinarily he and Anne were the best of chums.

"Where's Rose?" he asked abruptly. "I guess I'll find her, and perhaps I can help about something."

"Getting asparagus. Where do you suppose Anne is?" Without waiting for an answer Connie hurried on. "She's up-stairs studying. She hopes if she works every day this summer that she can go on next September with her class—the one she had to leave."

"Hope she can, I'm sure," Roger responded lightly. "She has my permission. Where did you say Rose is?"

"Getting asparagus," said Connie, just as she had said it before. "Let me tell you what I heard Anne say the other day." She hesitated a moment, not quite certain that Anne would want her to repeat this; then, convinced that the situation demanded it, went on hastily. "Anne said she wished she could have a teacher like Mr. Pearson; she knew she could just spin along."

"Oh, she did, did she?" Roger looked a little blank at the idea of considering this a privilege.

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"I'll tell you," he went on, "Anne may take my place and have the lessons, and I'll come over here every day and help in the garden. How'll that suit you?" His persuasive grin would have won almost any cause, but Connie was firm.

"But Anne doesn't help about the garden work," she said quickly. "You'll have to darn stockings and make beds and dust and—and fit in any old place where there's something no one else wants to do."

"I'm not for it," Roger declared. "But, say, if Anne can get time to study what's the matter with having my lessons over here every morning, and then she can have half of Mr. Pearson?"

Connie looked at him doubtfully. "Do you think he would like it?"

"Sure. He's the best ever. He'll jump at the chance. Let's go and tell Anne about it now."

"Not before you've asked Mr. Pearson." Connie spoke decidedly, and for the moment she had the feeling that Roger was about Jim's age, and she his older sister. "You haven't been here very long; you'd have time now ——" she stopped and the color mounted in her cheeks. Being a very polite sort of person she couldn't bear the idea of seeming to send anyone home.

Roger grinned understandingly. "I know what you want me to do," he grumbled. "You think I

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ought to get on my wheel and go back and have lessons, and tell Mr. Pearson about Anne ——”

“*Ask Mr. Pearson about Anne,*” interrupted Connie, who was not to be put down. She hoped she had sense enough to know that when Roger and Archie got fiercer and fiercer they didn’t mean a word of it. “I think that would be a beautiful plan. The morning is young, as Daddy sometimes says”—she smiled at him in her enjoyment at quoting so aptly one of her father’s frequent remarks—“and you’ll still have time for lessons. Then you can come over this afternoon and tell Anne.”

“Ask Anne,” corrected Roger with a satisfied air. “Connie, I know now why Ellis calls you the ‘Voice of Conscience.’ But you needn’t think I’m going to let a young thing like you tell me what I ought to do. I’ve come to call on the Sheldons, and it will take me the rest of the morning to round ’em up and look at ’em.” Roger paused teasingly, and Connie had no answer ready for him; there was a hint of anxiety in her eyes which he enjoyed.

“What did you say Rose is doing?” he went on slowly. “I guess I’ll go and ——” he stopped again, and Connie held her breath, “and get on my wheel and go back to Camp Bradley as fast as I can,” he finished in a hurry. “So long,” he was opening the screen door into the kitchen by this

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time, but he shut it again and came down the steps with a leap. "Don't mention it to Anne till I get back, will you?" he said in a whisper, and then vanished so quickly that Connie rubbed her eyes.

"Well, that's that," she said. "Now I'll look for eggs and then I'll make my bed."

Later in the morning, Rose, straightening and stretching after weeding one of the strawberry beds, caught a glimpse of someone peering at her from behind a clump of bushes not far away. As she looked the head dodged out of sight. She concluded at once that Susan and Jim were playing some sort of a game and had put her in it. "Probably they're pretending I'm an old witch," she said to herself, "and they're going to make believe shoot me with silver bullets, or some such foolish stuff as that."

She dropped on her knees once more and did a part of another bed, and when she next got up to rest, the same thing happened. Only this time she saw distinctly that it was neither Susan nor Jim, but a girl about Connie's height with straggling dark hair. "Well, of all things," she said to herself. "I don't like the idea of anyone coming here to watch me." For a moment she meditated as to what she should do. If she tried dashing around the bushes the girl would see her coming and run

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away, and Rose was curious to know who she was and why she was there.

She dropped down on her knees again, this time facing the clump of bushes, and so placing herself that the intruder would have to come a little farther into the open in order to see well. Then she worked and waited, and from under her hat, cautiously peeped out once in a while.

Presently she saw a soiled and tattered skirt—she couldn't see the girl's shoes because the thick grass concealed them—but there was something familiar about the skirt. She tipped her head slightly and her glance travelled upward. She saw thin hands clutching each other tightly; then the lower part of a torn and dingy blouse appeared, and she knew at once when and where she had seen it before. She did not dare openly to look any higher, but in her mind she could picture distinctly the tangled black hair and the haunting gaze of the girl whom she had seen at Mill Hollow. Dreadful place! She had tried to forget it. What was that girl's name? Almost immediately she remembered that that nice Mrs. Rand had called her "Lissy," and had said that she couldn't get hold of the girl inside of her. Rose recalled that because it had interested her.

If only Anne were here—or Connie. They both got on better with strangers than she did. Her

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own way would be to jump suddenly and capture the girl and that, she was sure, would not do.

Rose kept on weeding and trying to think out the best way to manage the situation. She wished the girl would go away so that she could forget about her. She was dirty and she had disagreeable, impish ways. Rose felt that she should not know in the least what to do with her. But Connie had a way of getting on with almost everyone.

She straightened in preparation for getting up to slip into the house and call Connie; then her head went down again and she smiled. "If Neil should know about this he'd say again that I'm always shoving chances for good deeds on my family," she said to herself, and reluctantly admitted that this repeated accusation was true up to now.

"But it shan't be any longer," she vowed with a fierceness that almost took her breath away. She wondered anxiously how she should go about the business of luring the girl from her hiding-place. Suddenly she remembered that Mrs. Rand had said Lissy had found a flower and had shown it to her. Rose looked around; not far away, flaunting its loveliness as if on purpose to help her, grew a spreading bush of early roses, deep pink, with buds crimson-tipped.

She got on her feet slowly, with her back toward the girl, and walked over to the bush. It was cov-

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ered with thorns and it seemed to her that she should never succeed in getting off the flower she had chosen. She would not give it up, though. It occurred to her that perhaps Lissy would be like this—very prickly, but worth working for. As she twisted the tough stem she heard behind her the sound of someone walking stealthily through the grass—or did she just imagine it?

Suddenly a voice, hoarse in its eagerness, said, “I help you, lady.”

“All right,” Rose answered coolly, and by an effort kept herself from turning. “If you can get it off you may have it.”

Lissy applied strong teeth to the stem and bit it through, regardless of thorns. “I have heem; he is mos’ beautifool,” she cried triumphantly.

“Come over here and we’ll sit down and look at it,” proposed Rose, not knowing anything better to do. Dropping down on the grass she drew from her pocket two cookies. “Have one,” she offered, and put it into the thin hand without waiting for a reply.

The girl ate it slowly, her eyes roving from the flower to Rose. “You are beautiful like this,” she said at last, holding up the flower, and embarrassing Rose by the admiration in her gaze. “I saw you and I have try—have try much days to find you.” She was speaking in a slow, soft way which was,

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nevertheless, full of purpose, and now her eyes never left Rose's face. "I will stay with you. I love you. I will do what—what you tell to me. You will be my mothair." It was a long speech for her, and at the end she gave a gasp of relief. Then her face broke into a smile which chased the sadness from her dark eyes.

Rose felt like running away, but instead she made a valiant attempt to smile in return. A little while ago she had been trying to win this girl, but now the tables were turned, and it was she who was being adopted as—as a mother. Catch her telling the family that! She should never hear the last of it.

It suddenly occurred to her that if she could persuade Lissy to be clean and decent and—and not a trouble-maker, it would be just as good, perhaps even better than helping Neil with his club. The boys could do that and—she came out of her reverie to find an exceedingly dirty hand smoothing her shoe.

"If I'm going to be your m-mother," she said, choking a little over the word, "you've got to be washed. Come on."

In the kitchen Effie looked doubtful and disapproving, and Lissy, sensing an unfriendly atmosphere, started to make a face at her, but Rose's frown and shake of the head stopped her just in time.

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"Oh, Effie!" Rose pulled Effie over by the window and talked in a low tone. "It's what they're all trying to do—help those people over in Mill Hollow, I mean. Such an awful place—and no one can get along with this girl, and she's been hunting for me."

Effie's set face softened, and she began to look interested.

"Won't you please help me out on this?" Rose hurried on. "It's only ten o'clock—couldn't we give her a bath? I—I'll do it if you'll only advise me." Rose's voice was heroic, but her involuntary shudder did not escape Effie's eyes.

"There's some of Connie's clothes she's grown too stout for. I mended 'em up thinkin' some child might need 'em," Effie said slowly. "And I'll give her a bath—you needn't touch her till she's clean."

"Effie, you're a darling duck! I hated to do it, but I didn't want to be a quitter. I wonder how she'll like it."

Fifteen minutes later that question was answered. Rose, standing outside the bath-room door, because Effie thought she could do better if she were alone with the girl, heard protesting shrieks, and words that were in a strange tongue and sounded angry. Then Effie's voice trying to be calm and soothing—a splash in the tub—another shriek—and, after an

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interval, more splashing and a droning continuous murmur which seemed to indicate resignation.

After waiting for a while Rose tiptoed into her father's room to sit down and found him taking a half hour's rest from garden work.

"What's going on, Posy?" he asked with some curiosity. "I fancied I heard sounds of woe."

"You did. It's a girl from Mill Hollow. You've heard Miss Dean talk about that place. Effie's washing her, and I guess she was afraid to get into the tub. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not if Effie's in charge. How did you get hold of the girl?"

"I didn't—she got hold of me." Rose smiled over the memory of it. "Daddy, she says I've got to be her mother. Keep it mum, won't you; I wouldn't have the others hear it for anything."

"I'll never tell. And you must be a good mother. It will never do to destroy such confidence as that." Father got up from his chair and stood smiling down at Rose, who realized for the first time what a change even these few weeks of outdoor life had made in him.

"Daddy, you look almost as young as Ellis this morning," she said happily. "It has done you good, hasn't it, coming to Brookfield?"

"Heaps of good," answered her father briefly.

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"You don't mind it yourself so much as you did, I'm thinking."

Rose felt guilty; he had guessed her thoughts, after all. "I believe I'm beginning to like it," she said slowly, and then, because her father's eyes always seemed to demand perfect honesty from her, "at least, I don't dislike it as much as I did. As long as I keep busy I don't have time to think about Melford."

"Well, as Ellis would say, 'go to it.' Only, Posy, if you begin to help this little girl, don't get tired of it and drop her all of a sudden. That, for some natures, would be worse than not being helped at all."

"I probably shall get tired of it," Rose admitted in a burst of candor, "but I'll try to stick to my job just the same. Oh, I believe they're coming out. Good-bye, Daddy. I must let her see that I haven't gone back on her already."

She darted into the hall, and fairly held her breath as the bath-room door opened and Lissy appeared. The dress, too tight for Connie, hung loosely on the slender figure of this girl, but it was clean and whole, and its wearer evidently felt proud of it. Her wet hair was concealed by a towel, and she carried her head erect. There was a look of anxiety in her eyes until she saw Rose and then she smiled brilliantly.

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“You—you get in this beeg—this beeg water, too?” she questioned at once. “I have been frightened of heem, but now I—I love heem. You love heem, too?” she ended eagerly.

Rose’s nod and smile assured her that she was doing the proper thing in loving the “beeg water.”

“And here,” Lissy darted back to the tub and seized the soap, “I love heem also.” She cuddled it in both hands and held it against her cheek; she sniffed it rapturously. “You give heem to me, ple-ease, lady. I make myself clean”—her sad eyes became all at once humorous—“if I ever be dirty again after this—this so good wash.” Her sweeping gesture took in the whole room and Effie as its presiding genius.

“All right, you may have the soap. We’ll put a paper ’round it and you may take it home. Now come out into the garden and dry your hair.”

“Let’s give her some bread and butter and a glass of milk,” whispered Effie. “I should think she’d be worn out; the scrubbing I give her was something fierce.”

“Oh, of course. I ought to have thought of that. She looks dreadfully thin.”

“She would; she’s clean now,” remarked Effie with one of her rare smiles, and then they all went down-stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

BIG SISTERS AND BROTHERS

AFTER the bread and milk, Connie helped Rose comb out the mass of hair which hung over the girl's shoulders, and Lissy bore it like a hero though it was unbelievably tangled. Once she faced Rose with the question, "You do this, too? Your hair he—he tie heemself up like this?"

"Sometimes," answered Rose. "It's almost done now," and again the child straightened herself and bore the rest of it without a murmur.

When it was finished it fell in a soft black cloud about her face, and Rose tied it back with one of her own ribbons. Then they took her to a mirror, and let her look at herself as long as she pleased.

Back in the garden again Lissy's face wore an expression of awe mingled with distress. Rose, who had thought she would be perfectly happy, was disappointed and tried in vain to think what could be the matter; but it was Miss Dean, who had come over to talk with Mr. Sheldon and Ellis, who solved the mystery.

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As the three girls approached she turned, and her eyes opened wide at sight of Lissy. "Well, of all things! You're fine and dandy, aren't you, Lissy? Fine—and—dandy!"

"Fine—and—dandy," repeated the girl as if this were a sort of game with Miss Eunice, and then, to the surprise of everyone she burst into a passion of tears. For a few minutes no one could comfort her, but when she was able to speak she talked directly to Miss Eunice.

"The woman will—will take eet away from me," she sobbed. "All—all—this beautiful robe—these shoes and stockings—this lovely theeng——" she took carefully from her pocket a pink-bordered handkerchief which Anne had contributed.

"She means the woman who took her after her mother died," Miss Dean explained rapidly, walking away a few steps and speaking so that the child could not hear. "Her mother was a French woman, who came to this country and somehow, poor soul, drifted to Mill Hollow. It hasn't been good for Lissy to live with this woman, but no one else wanted her. Perhaps Mrs. Rand could take her now; she's tried to be friendly to the child."

"'Lissy'! It seems to me that's a queer name for a French child," Anne observed.

"The children call her that. Her name's *Félicie*, or something like it," explained Miss Eunice,

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pronouncing the foreign name with some uncertainty.

"I suppose that is the French form of our 'Felicia,' and Felicia means happiness," said Mr. Sheldon.

"Gee-whillikins!" muttered Ellis with such intensity that Rose felt grateful to him. "It'll take the poor kid some time to catch up with her name. Some of us ought to do something."

"I judge from what they tell me that her mother was superior to most of those women over there and tried to help the others. We haven't done right by her child." Miss Dean shook her head in a worried way over her own shortcomings, and began immediately to reform by going back to Lissy and drying her eyes with a large handkerchief. "See here, Lissy," she said gently, "I'll go home with you this afternoon. You shall keep your clothes or I'll know the reason why."

"I'm going to take Ellen and Neil over there in my car, and I'll talk to the woman," she went on, turning to Rose. "There'll be room in the car for Lissy, too."

The girl besought Rose with a look. "If you come I feel all right," she said with so softened an air that it was hard to think her the same girl whom Rose had first seen at Mill Hollow.

"Archie's coming this afternoon with his car;

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perhaps he'd take some of us over there," suggested Connie. To her this was an interesting adventure, and she wanted it to go on and on.

This being settled for the present, Rose went back to her weeding, and speedily taught Lissy the difference between what should and what should not grow in a strawberry bed. The girl was so quick to understand, so imitative, that Rose caught herself trying to do and say everything in the best way. It was rather a joke at first to have someone following her example so closely, but after a while it troubled her, and she yearned to get away, or, at least, to evade the persistent anxious gaze of the dark eyes.

After dinner it seemed to her that someone in the family might take the girl off her hands for a while; but Connie, the one most likely to do it, was mysteriously interested in Roger's arrival, and kept near Anne, as if she were afraid she should miss something. Finally Lissy consented to go with Susan and Jim and Rex to pick buttercups, and Rose drew a deep breath of relief and went in search of her father. For a wonder he was alone, taking an after-dinner rest on the east piazza, and she poured out her troubles at once.

"Daddy, I'm worried to pieces; I'm a quitter already—in my mind," she confessed. "She watches me every minute and she tries to do just

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what I do, and—oh, I suppose I sound like a goose, but ——”

Her father laughed and pulled her down on the arm of his chair. “You’re not a goose,” he comforted. “No normal person would enjoy that sort of thing. But it won’t last, Posy; she’s just as new to the job as you are, and she’ll get used to it in a little while.”

“Perhaps,” Rose doubted. “But how about me? Do you suppose I shall ever get used to it?” And then, before her father could answer, in a sudden burst of confidence, she added, “Daddy, I’m scared. I’m getting so that I can’t go off and have a good time and forget about everybody and everything. It’s a kind of worrisome feeling; I don’t know just what’s happening to me.”

Mr. Sheldon laughed again, and Rose put her hand over his mouth. “Sh!” she said hurriedly. “If you laugh, the others will come to see what the joke is, and I want you all to myself”—she paused, and a queer expression stole into her face—“why, that last sounded quite natural, didn’t it, Daddy? I guess I’m not so very different, after all.”

“What do you think is causing this change of heart, Posy?” Her father was regarding her seriously, but there was a twinkle in his eye which made Rose smile responsively.

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“ You’re laughing at me, but I don’t mind. I’ve been trying to find out myself why I feel different and I think it’s Neil’s fault. His and Ellen’s, I mean. They’re not just like the other girls and boys I know. Still they’re not goody-goody, either ”—she was puckering her forehead in the effort to think it out correctly—“ but there’s something about them that makes me feel—makes me feel as if I wanted—oh, I can’t explain it, Daddy, but you know what I mean; you always do.”

“ It’s hard to put the idea into words, isn’t it, Posy? I suspect they make you feel as if there was something else worth doing besides just having a good time.”

“ I suppose that’s it. Thoughts and feelings aren’t easy to explain, though. I never used to be bothered with ’em—this kind, I mean.” She sighed and snuggled closer to her father. “ Well,” she went on after a moment, “ I don’t know just why, but telling you about it has helped. I’m going to try to stand it to be watched every second and ——”

“ Put yourself in the girl’s place, Posy. Suppose you were in a dark, shut-in place and suddenly a star appeared to show you the way out. The cases are not exactly alike, but I fancy you seem a sort of guiding star to her.”

“ Me! A guiding star!” Rose looked as if she thought this the most absurd idea possible. “ If I

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should try being one I should always be running into the other stars or getting knocked by a comet."

"Rose!" said her father so soberly that she blinked and stood at attention. "Rose, if you're not careful you'll develop an imagination, and that, I believe, is one of your chief causes of complaint against Anne and Connie."

"Goodness, Father! You actually scared me. But I'm afraid you don't know your own child if you think of her as a star."

"Well, if I don't know her, at least I have confidence in her," responded Mr. Sheldon with gratifying promptness. "Just be yourself, Posy, and don't let the little girl worry you. We'll all try ——" he stopped, because Anne's voice, calling "Father!" was coming nearer and nearer. "Yes, Nan. What is it?" he answered.

It was not only Anne who came running around the corner of the house, but with her Archie and Roger and Mr. Pearson, and lastly Connie, who was as excited as Anne.

"Oh, Daddy, what do you think?" Anne began. "Roger and Mr. Pearson are coming over here every morning for lessons, and Mr. Pearson is going to help me about mine. Isn't that the nicest thing you ever heard, and wasn't it wonderful of Roger to think of it and plan it?" Anne's eyes were shining and her cheeks were faintly pink.

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"I say you mustn't give me all the credit," began Roger, and then jumped because Connie's fingers had closed fiercely on a small piece of his arm. "Well, of course," he went on in an injured tone, "of course it wouldn't have done any good for me to plan it if Mr. Pearson hadn't been willing."

"I should say not." Anne was beaming on Mr. Pearson now, and she did not hear Connie whisper to Roger, "Don't you dare to let her know; she wouldn't like it so well."

"I know," Anne began again, "that you'll have the most bother, Mr. Pearson. But I'll work so hard you'll like to teach me."

"I already like it," Mr. Pearson answered with his pleasant smile. "I love to teach when my pupils want to learn."

In spite of the fact that his look did not even graze Roger, that young gentleman squirmed. "I didn't tell you the only condition he made when I asked him, Anne," he remarked with a chuckle. "He said if I wasn't on hand for my lessons you'd lose yours. You see I'm up against it."

"Oh, I see," Anne said softly, remembering what Archie had said about Roger's lessons, and then again, "I see."

"Anne, you're evidently not the only grateful one," put in Archie with a grin. "I've noticed a

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new courage in Mr. Pearson's face since the plan was made."

Anne laughed and understood. "Roger Bradley, if you make me miss a lesson"—she began, and then—"anyway, I'm perfectly delighted, and you were a dear to think of it."

Roger looked uncomfortable, and edged around to where he could stare grimly at Connie, who was placidly undisturbed by his disapproval. In her mind she was vowing that as soon as she got Roger alone she would tell him that Anne must never know who had put the idea into his head. She liked him, though, for hating to take the credit for it.

"Archie, will you take us over to Mill Hollow this afternoon?" asked Rose, feeling that enough time had been spent on the subject of lessons. "Is your car stretchable?"

"Sure. I'll take all that want to go. Passengers allowed to sit on the floor without extra charge."

"All right, that settles it. Miss Dean is going by about three o'clock. All who want to go be ready then. And now, Nan, will you please come in and see if there is anything more that I may have for Lissy?"

"This was one of my favorite dresses," Connie said somewhat later, smoothing a pink gingham

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with loving fingers. "I'm honestly sorry it's too small."

"Oh, pooh, I wouldn't give it away if I liked it," advised Susan, who had hunted up a hair-ribbon she did not care for to give to the girl from Mill Hollow. "You could have a piece put in. Catch me giving away my favoritest things."

"Well"—Connie looked as if she were considering a serious problem—"I like to give away a thing I like, because if I like it then I think someone else may like it, too."

"Help, help!" protested Jim. "You had four likes in that sentence, Connie."

"That proves it," answered Connie serenely. "What are you going to give her, Jimsey?"

"Something I like. When I was drawing out on the porch a while ago she got down beside me and watched me. Then, very slyly——" Jim was enjoying Connie's rapt attention and he paused a moment to prolong the interest.

"Yes," urged his sister—"very slyly"—go on; what happened?"

"She took one of my pencils and stuck it in her pocket. She didn't think I saw her."

"And what did you do?"

Jim frowned. He was cutting out and pasting a paper house, and it did not go to suit him. "Well, I didn't want her to take it that way," he

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said after a vexatious delay, "'cause it looked like—you know what it looked like. So I just said, 'Give me that one and I'll let you have a better one'; and then the only really better one was my very best one. But she got it all the same."

"Good for you, Jimsey," Connie said warmly.

"Huh!" muttered Susan, "you'll never get it back again."

"Don't expect to; didn't I give it to her? I've just thought of another thing, too. I'm going to slide into that box you're fixing for her one of the tablets Daddy gave me so she'll have something to draw on."

"Huh!" said Susan again, trying to make it sound as if she scorned all such doings as this. Five minutes afterwards, however, she slipped away, but came back somewhat later to add to the gifts intended for Lissy a small work-bag containing the articles necessary for sewing.

No one else was in the room at this moment so Susan talked to herself as she often did. "I like this little bag," she said, holding it up for a final inspection and putting her hand inside. She was not quite sure that she should be permitted to give this bag away, and she decided to tuck it under Connie's dress where it might not be seen.

"I love this thimble, and probably it won't make that other girl's finger ache the way it does mine,"

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she went on in a satisfied tone. "And, of course, I like these shiny, sharp needles, and this lovely thread, and these little buttons and pins, but I'll give 'em all to her." Then her groping fingers touched the scissors and she drew them from the bag.

"Oh, I don't b'lieve she'd like these," she said hastily. "She might cut herself with these, and I—I know how to use 'em." She pulled the draw-strings of the bag as if fearful that it might swallow the cherished scissors. Then she stood perfectly silent for a moment. At last she opened the bag with evident reluctance, and over its gaping mouth swung the scissors on her small finger. "I like you, little sidders," she murmured, "I——" her finger dipped suddenly to let the scissors slide off. "Go in there," she said sternly, and pulled up the strings with a jerk. Then she poked the bag under Connie's dress as she had planned, and wholly at peace with the world went to find her family.

That afternoon Rose had a chance to see with what apparent ease Miss Dean managed people. As soon as her automobile appeared in Mill Hollow that gloomy settlement took on the air of trying to put its best foot foremost. Frowsy heads appeared at the windows and disappeared as quickly; children were called in and given a polish which left

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them red and gasping; one woman hurried to show Miss Eunice a garment which she had put together with great neatness; another came with some little cakes made according to a recipe she had learned in her native country.

One and all they stared and wondered at the transformed Lissy, who clung tightly to Rose's hand, looking both proud and apprehensive. She was sure that no one ever had on better clothes than she was wearing at the present moment, but she could not help fearing that when her new friends left her all other joys would depart also. Nevertheless she pinned her faith to Miss Eunice and Rose.

Soon after their arrival Miss Dean mentioned that Mr. Rand needed help in some work he was doing, and Ellis, Archie and Roger volunteered at once, leaving Neal and Mr. Pearson in the automobile. Ellen collected her sewing-class and went off to one side to criticize and encourage; Connie made love to an attractive baby who was fairly clean. Anne wanted to get acquainted with someone, but, with a sudden return of her old shyness, felt that she did not know how to begin.

"Look at Neil," said Rose suddenly, and Anne turned to find that already the running-board of the car was crowded with small boys. "He thinks he doesn't do anything entertaining," Rose went on,



"SHE IS THE BEEG SISTER OF ME."

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"but there's something about him that draws 'em like flies 'round a molasses barrel."

"What's he doing?" murmured Anne, looking with curiosity at the intent group. "Oh, I know. He's teaching them to tie some of the different kinds of knots."

Rose gazed and tried to recall a memory which the scene suggested. In her absorption she almost forgot the hand clinging to her own. "I've got it," she said at last. "Do you remember, Nan, what Father read to us last winter about the 'Big Brother Club'? That's what Neil makes me think of."

"So he does," agreed Miss Eunice, who had come up unperceived in time to hear the last remark. "I read about the 'Big Brothers,' too."

The clasp on Rose's hand tightened, and Lissy spoke for the first time since they had reached Mill Hollow. Indicating Rose with an adoring glance she said, "She is the beeg brother——" she shook her head impatiently and began over again, "She is the beeg sister of me, is eet not?"

"'Out of the mouth of babes,'" quoted Miss Eunice softly, and stared at Anne and Rose with the eyes of one who visions wonderful possibilities. "She's hit it," she said at last; "that's what we'll have here if all you youngsters will help me out—Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Anne, you talk it

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over with the others as fast as you can get hold of them, while Rose and I decide what's to be done with a certain young person."

Under Miss Dean's guidance plans shaped themselves magically. The worn-faced woman with many children who had tried to get the most work she could out of Lissy, agreed without much trouble to let Miss Dean make a change in the child's home, saying, with a shrug, that someone else might have the bother of her. Mrs. Rand had a small room which she was willing to let Lissy have, so that part of it was quickly settled.

"And Miss Rose is to be her Big Sister—a sort of guardian, you know, who'll be ready to help her out of her difficulties," said Miss Eunice cheerfully. "You agree to that, don't you, Rose?"

"Ye-es." It was a promise, and Rose meant it that way, but all the time a part of her mind was tugging against it. This had all happened in spite of her, she was thinking. The girl had adopted her, and Miss Eunice had managed them both, and—well, anyway, she had promised; she couldn't back out now. Probably this would show Neil that she had been right in saying that she hadn't patience enough to teach anyone anything.

The others took up the idea with enthusiasm. Connie separated herself from the enticing baby with regret, and chose to be big sister to a shy,

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sickly little girl who wouldn't be picked out by anyone else she was sure.

"I wish I could give her some of my flesh," she said confidentially to Ellen Ramsay. "I've got so much more than I need; just before I came to Brookfield a girl in school called me 'Fatty,' and I hated it."

"She was horrid," comforted Ellen. "I shouldn't want you to be much thinner, Connie." Ellen had time to help the others choose, because she felt that her part was already decided for her, and that she must be big sister to all the girls in her sewing-class.

Going home, with Miss Dean's car leading so that she might show them a road they had not tried before, they talked over the choices they had made.

"I bet my boy is going to amount to a lot more than your girl will," Archie said teasingly to Rose. "I think he's a genius, or something of that kind. Your girl's a regular spitfire."

"Your boy looks as if he didn't have spirit enough to say 'scat,'" she retorted. "I prefer my own job, thank you."

"I believe Miss Dean magicked us into doing all this," Roger said with a worried air. He had chosen a dreamy-faced boy whom he had found off by himself tooting on a tin whistle. "Now I come

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to think it over I don't believe I want to be a big brother. I've got troubles of my own."

"Oh, don't back out," implored Anne, who had secret doubts of her own ability in this line. She wanted to feel that this was a cast-iron agreement, and failure to keep it an impossibility.

"He won't be a quitter," remarked Archie placidly. "If he tries it I'll 'big brother' him."

"I picked out a boy that looks strong," said Ellis. "I thought perhaps I could teach him to do a few little things about the garden."

"Oh, Ellis! I call that looking out for number one," protested Rose. "Perhaps he'll have a talent for something else."

"Well, let him show it and I'll cultivate it. Until I find out what it is I'm not bound to recognize it. And talent or no talent I'm firmly convinced that everyone should know how to garden."

"Stick to it, old boy," encouraged Archie. "Those are noble thoughts. Oh, I say, look at that brook over there. I'll bet you'll find trout in it."

After this the conversation concerned itself with trout-streams, and fishes of enormous size; with hikes and camping. Rose, usually as keen about these subjects as the boys, felt dreamily disinclined to talk, and leaned back in the car, sometimes not even hearing what the others were saying.

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As it had before, the green countryside looked doubly beautiful to her after seeing Mill Hollow, and for a while she tried to think of nothing but the sky and hills and the perfumed breath of the breeze that cooled her cheek. Then it occurred to her that it wasn't playing the game to forget Mill Hollow now; she must keep it and Lissy in her thoughts. A few minutes later she spoke to Anne under cover of an animated discussion.

"Oh, Nan," she said softly, "you know that Mrs. Wilber who drops in so often to see you. She's got a girl about Lissy's size, and I believe I'll ask her if she has any clothes to spare."

A smile danced into Anne's eyes, but was sternly repressed as her sister hurried on.

"Oh, I know I've slid out of the way every time she came in, but I'll go and see her properly if you think it will help."

"I'm sure it will," Anne said heartily. "That's a good scheme, because Lissy does look rather lost in Connie's clothes."

Rose settled back again saying to herself that Nan was a good old scout. She never made fun of you when you had an idea like this. Rose felt a little like laughing at herself. Pretty soon, perhaps, she should be doing all the things she had thought she should never do. Why, here she was this very minute planning to call on a neighbor; and

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she had promised to look after a girl. Already she was liking Brookfield much better than she had dreamed she could; and she had learned to find Miss Eunice both interesting and likable.

“Horrid, superior little snob, wasn’t I, the day I got here?” she asked herself in scorn, remembering how she wished the children wouldn’t be so friendly with their entertaining fellow-traveller. She recalled that her father had said, “If you’re worth as much as I think you are you’ll find out some day how much Miss Dean means to her neighbors;” and she, like a simpleton, had thought Miss Eunice had been telling of her own good deeds. Now that would be the last thing she should imagine.

“If you are worth as much as I think you are ——” she hadn’t thought of that part of it particularly when Daddy said it, but now it seemed to her to mean that he was counting on her, too, and that he believed there was something in her big enough to appreciate Miss Dean. It was curious about likes and dislikes. It had never occurred to her before that if she did not like a person it might be from some lack on her own part. It was queer how she was thinking things out nowadays; queer and a little bothersome, she decided with a sigh, and she wondered what would happen next to make her change her previous ideas.

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She was still pondering over this when the automobile swept through what Anne called the main avenue of Brookfield, and approached the Sheldon house. Then, in a flash, she knew exactly what her next problem was to be.

Coming down the path to meet them, with Mr. Sheldon behind her, and Susan and Jim near at hand, was a lady in a blue dress whose wavy hair gleamed bronze in the sunlight. At sight of her, Anne uttered a cry of joy, but Rose sat silent and wished she did not have to look.

The moment Miss Dean's car stopped, Ellen Ramsay was out of it and hugging the newcomer with all her might. "Oh, Cousin Jean, why didn't you let us know you would be here to-day?" she questioned. "We shouldn't have stirred from the house if we had dreamed you were coming."

"I didn't know it myself until this morning," answered Miss Graham. "I had a chance to motor here with some friends. Hegan told me you had gone with Miss Eunice, so after I had changed my dress I thought I would walk over here and see this friend of mine." She turned to put out both hands to Anne, who came up to her flushed and smiling.

"Hegan didn't say that this was to be a combination party so I fancied I might find you at home," Jean Graham went on. "Anne, how well

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you look, and happy, too. I shall have to ask you over again if you are sure you are the same girl I met on that porch in Melford?"

"No," laughed Anne, shaking her head, "I'm quite sure I'm not the same. I certainly don't feel like her." Her voice was joyful, and there was a glad light in her eyes. This was her Miss Graham who had put out a friendly hand to help when she had thought her own troubles were overwhelming.

"I say, Cousin Jean, aren't you going to speak to me?" Neil was stretching a welcoming hand from the car, the wistful eagerness of his expression showing plainly how he would like to spring out and greet her.

Rose, catching a glimpse of his face, felt a twinge of conscience. She had stepped out of the car slowly, letting the others get ahead of her, and now she hesitated, unconsciously frowning a little, and, for the moment, feeling curiously apart from her family. She was not a bit glad to see Miss Graham, and yet she could not explain even to herself why she did not like her.

Suddenly that interfering inner self of hers supplied an explanation. "It's because you're contrary, and you never do like anyone the others are crazy about," it said with what Rose considered disagreeable candor.

"I'm not either," she contradicted in her mind,

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and then, with her compelling honesty, added, "Perhaps I have been snippy about Miss Graham, but Anne made me tired. Oh, dear, what difference does it make anyway? I suppose I can say I'm glad to see her."

As she walked slowly toward the welcoming group she saw that Neil's eyes were fixed upon her. In his glance were a question and a challenge, and Rose seemed to understand both. It was almost as if he were saying aloud, "Are you going to let anyone else know you don't like my cousin? Brace up and put the best face on it."

Involuntarily, Rose straightened her shoulders and took a deep breath. She would show Neil Ramsay. Then she pushed between Connie and Ellen, who were both talking at the same moment, and putting out her hand said with a smile, "Do you remember me, Miss Graham? I'm Rose."

CHAPTER XIV

CHOCOLATES TO DOUGHNUTS

"WHERE'S Rose?" Connie stepped out on the porch where Anne was pacing up and down in the morning sunshine, book in hand, gabbling as she walked. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you when you were studying."

"I believe I know it now," Anne responded joyously. "Roger and I have the same Latin and History, you know, and when he really works I have to scramble to keep up with him. He and Mr. Pearson will be here soon. What was it you asked me?"

"If you know where Rose is. I thought I saw Lissy coming. I guess I was mistaken, but she'll be here before long. Perhaps Rose has skipped out early on purpose."

"Lissy hasn't missed a day in the two weeks since she adopted Rose, has she? Poor old Posy is having a harder time than we are, Connie. Our 'little sisters' only come when we urge them."

"I know it. Mine is scared pink of everyone

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here, and won't open her mouth except for something to eat, and yours isn't much better. But Lissy seems different from the rest of them; she has a kind of—a kind of a thirsty mind."

"I think she appeals to Rose, because so often she begs to go into the 'beeg water,'" Anne said dreamily. She was sitting on the railing now, gazing across a far-reaching meadow opposite the house; it was a carpet of soft green which extended to the darker green of the pines in the distance. She brought herself back with an effort, and took up the subject just where she had left it. "Rose loves baths, you know."

"She's awfully quick to learn; Lissy, I mean. She takes her bath all by herself now, and even Effie says she doesn't make a bit of clutter in the bath-room. Only"—Connie came as near as possible to Anne and spoke low—"do you notice that there's never a bit of soap left after she gets through? I didn't think anything about it at first, but now I know that it vanishes every time. Do you"—her voice became deeply mysterious—"do you s'pose she eats it?"

"No, I don't," laughed Anne. "Probably she likes the soapsuds and lets the soap stay in the water too long. Only this morning Effie was telling me how fast our last lot of soap is going, and this helps to account for it. I must speak to Rose about it."

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"Speak away," put in Rose herself, coming out of the house just in time to hear the last words. "What have I been doing now?"

"Anyone would think you were always being scolded," remarked Connie, gazing at her sister with the approval which Rose's prettiness never failed to draw from her. "We were talking about Lissy."

"Don't tell me she's here." Rose looked worried. "Say, Connie, I was hunting for you to ask if you wouldn't just for to-day be an angel and take her off my hands."

"Perhaps that sounds like being a quitter," she went on hastily, turning to Anne with a perplexed frown, "but really I don't mean it that way. Only I'm plain tired of having her tag me every minute."

"I don't wonder at it. Connie and I were just saying that she's never missed a day." Anne's matter-of-fact way of understanding the situation smoothed the puckers out of her sister's forehead at once. "I think you're doing wonders with her. You've taught her a lot already."

Rose looked pleased. "It isn't that I wish I had any of the other children," she explained hastily, "because I don't. Lissy interests me, and she's such a little scratch-cat with some people that—well, it makes me feel rather prideful to know that I can turn her into a perfect lamb."

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“ ‘My beau-ti-fool beeg sister,’ ” quoted Connie, in excellent imitation, and then wished she hadn’t, because probably her sister wouldn’t like it.

But Rose only made up a face and laughed. “I’m only one of many ‘beau-ti-fool’ things,” she retorted. “Sometimes I think that child is a little off,” she went on with perfect seriousness. “She’s daffy about color; the only reason she bows down to me is because I have red cheeks and molasses-candy-colored hair. Why, the other day I nearly stepped on her when we were working in the garden, because she was flat on her back in the deep grass, looking up at the sky, and singing over and over, ‘beau-ti-fool—beau-ti-fool.’ Would you believe anyone could be so cracked as that?”

“I’d believe it—easy,” said Jim, who in his turn had come around the corner unperceived. “Did you ever try it?” he went on dreamily. “The tall grass makes a kind of a green nest, and you half shut your eyes, and the sky looks a deep, deep blue, and you—well, you sort of float off——” Jimsey shook himself out of his rhapsody, and came back to earth with a snicker, for Rose was staring at him as if she thought he had gone mad.

“Another of ’em,” she murmured helplessly, “and in my own family, too. Perhaps Connie knows what you see in it, but I certainly don’t.”

“Try it some time and perhaps you will,” ad-

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vised Connie, who had already given her brother a look of complete understanding. "Rose, I wish you'd skip off now before Lissy comes. I can manage her better if you're not 'round, and I'll keep her busy this morning."

"And I'll take care of her this afternoon," Anne offered. "Why don't you go to Miss Emeline and get started on your gardening costume?" she suggested. "Father told you that you might have it."

"I know it; I've been so busy—there are so many things to do here——" Rose broke off with a laugh at sight of Anne's amused face. "I suppose you're dying to tell me that wasn't the way I talked when I first came. You may laugh if you like. I'm beginning to feel frightfully good-natured. I believe I could even stay at home and manage Lissy."

"You'll have a chance if you don't skedaddle," said Jim, who was walking on the railing and could see farther than the others. "She's coming now, and she's got on that horrid, old, mud-colored dress that Mrs. Wilber gave you. Why didn't you get someone to give you something decent?"

"How can I help it?" demanded Rose, poised for flight, but lingering. "I hate it as much as you do. Fancy anyone who loves pretty colors having to wear that thing. Well, I'm really going now,

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and you needn't expect me till you see me. Daddy said I could stop off garden work for a whole day. I may even go neighboring, Connie."

She heard Connie's irresistible laughter over this last idea as she sped through the house, and she smiled in response. Then she snatched up her hat and departed, secure in the knowledge that she could get around the bend in the road before Lissy would realize that she was not at home.

It wasn't a bad idea of Anne's, she meditated, that she should go and talk to Miss Emeline about the garden dress. She still wanted it, of course, but really there had been so many things on her mind lately. And when you had to do everything the best way you knew how, because an eager-eyed young person was watching every movement, it took time.

Then, naturally, Brookfield had seemed a very different place with Archie and Roger coming over every day, and a chance to explore the country in their automobile. Only yesterday Archie had let her drive the greater part of the way, and had not needed to tell her anything.

Thinking of the automobile made her mind jump to her father, who was going this afternoon with Miss Graham and Mr. Pearson to get material for an article on one of the old towns not far away. "It took her to find out how much Daddy knows

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about history and houses and gardens," Rose said to herself with a hint of envy. "She's got them all going. Daddy's so interested in these articles; Mr. Pearson has sent for books on old furniture; the boys are always digging up something they think she ought to write about."

Whenever it had occurred to her during the last two weeks, Rose had been obliged to admit that her newest problem was no problem at all, because Miss Graham fitted into Brookfield life perfectly. As a matter of fact she couldn't have told exactly what she had expected to happen, but, at any rate, she had fancied that Anne's wonderful friend would give them all, particularly herself, good advice, and would always be watching to see if they followed it.

"But instead," Rose was arguing the case as she walked along the tree-lined road, "instead, though she seems to like us, she's so keen about her work that she's made us all interested in it. That is, all the others, I mean. Well, I never could be daffy about her the way Anne and Ellen and Connie are. She doesn't bother me—much." That mean little jealousy in regard to Anne and her father stirred within her as she thought this last, and she frowned impatiently. "Anyway," her mind went on quickly, "I've managed to keep Neil guessing as to how I feel," and with this she dropped the subject, because she was going up the steps of

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Miss Emeline's little shop, and as she opened the door, a jangling bell brought that small person, herself, from an inner room.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so glad to see you," Miss Emeline said at once. "You're the first neighbor who's happened in this morning, and I've really hated to ask anyone to come."

She looked even paler than usual, and her eyes were tired, and her welcoming hands trembled. If Rose had not known something of what she accomplished, she would have supposed her a creature too fragile to be left alone.

"Why, what's the matter, Miss Emmy?" Rose liked the little name the children called her and thought it suited her. "Tell me something to do and I'll do it. I'm just neighboring, as Connie says." She decided immediately that her real errand must be given up. One couldn't ask anyone so tired as this to think of dress patterns.

"Well, that sounds good to me. Not that I want anything special done, but I'm thankful to have someone around. You see, Eunice went away yesterday morning and won't be home till to-night; and this morning, while she was getting breakfast, our Marilla, who always takes such care of me, had what she calls a 'stitch.' I actually had to help her back into bed again—and make her stay there, too." She was such a small, valiant creature,

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and yet so weary, that Rose felt an impulse to pick her up in her strong young arms and put her in bed also.

"I wanted to telephone for the doctor," Miss Emeline went on, "but Marilla is the most stubborn creature. She said she'd get over it sooner if she kept warm and was let alone, so I tucked the hot-water bag under her side, and made her promise that she wouldn't try to get up until I said she might—which won't be soon."

This last bit of defiance was spoken in a firm voice and Miss Emeline's eyes sparkled. She took a duster from a cupboard back of the counter and began to wipe the woodwork. "Excuse me for dusting when I have company," she apologized. "I usually do it the first thing after breakfast, and now—why, it's 'most eleven."

"I'm not company; I'm a member of the firm," Rose said, and tugged gently at the duster. "Please let me do it, or would you rather have me get dinner?" She was conscious of her magnificent audacity in proposing this last with such assurance. Anne and Effie would be aghast, but they were half a mile away, and she was sure Miss Emmy didn't know how little used she was to taking the responsibility of getting meals.

"Would you really do that?" There was a note of gratitude in the tired voice that made Rose vow

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that she would stand by until better help came, and do anything she could. "I was so anxious about Marilla I scarcely ate any breakfast and I'm beginning to feel just a little shaky. Suppose I let you go out and explore and give us a picked-up lunch," Miss Emeline ended with charming confidence. "It's so warm we shan't need a hot dinner."

"All right; I'll begin now. And please don't dust, because I'll do that afterwards."

"You're a darling," Miss Emmy said warmly, and wondered why she had never appreciated before the good qualities of this member of the Sheldon family.

Getting the lunch was so absurdly easy that Rose couldn't pride herself on any particular capacity. Her first look in the ice-box showed her lettuce, cold potatoes and string-beans, and a jar of home-made salad dressing which she tasted critically.

"La! La! Très bon," she said airily, and wondered if her French teacher would approve of this expression. "Probably the adjective's the wrong gender; anything as nice as salad-dressing ought to be feminine if it isn't."

She boiled two eggs hard and set the saucepan under running water to cool them. She filled the teakettle, and went to ask Miss Emmy how she liked to have her tea made. She found a delicious-

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looking cake in the pantry, and poured creamy milk into a quaint blue and white pitcher.

While she was in the dining-room setting the table the shop-door-bell rang, and a little later she could hear Miss Emeline telling a customer that Miss Rose Sheldon was helping her, and that she really shouldn't need to bother anyone else.

"Goodness, no!" Rose said to herself with an approving nod. "If I'm going to help I want to do it my way and not have anyone else mixing in. Please stick to that, little Miss Emmy."

It really was an appetizing lunch, and Miss Emmy ate with relish and chatted and laughed like a girl. Then she insisted on taking tea and toast up-stairs, herself, for fear Marilla would object to having a stranger come in. Rose contented herself with carrying the tray to the door of the room, and felt like a giant of strength beside the frail little lady whose spirit was not to be daunted.

Then she went down-stairs to clear the table and wash the dishes in the most approved manner. She flattered herself that she knew how things should be done, even though she did not care to do them as a rule. Anyway, it was easier to wash Miss Emmy's dishes than one's own.

"Oh, my dear, I didn't mean to have you do all this," Miss Emeline said with dismay when she came down with the tray. "I telephoned this morning

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for Abbie Toms, who always comes to help us when we need her, but to-day she can't get here till four o'clock. I meant to tell you to leave the dishes for her." Her voice wavered into a yawn, and she swayed dizzily. "Excuse me; I'm sleepy," she apologized. "I never sleep so well when Eunice is away, and last night I heard every hour strike."

"Miss Emmy, if you'll trust me," Rose began eagerly, "I'll take care of the shop and you can have a nap. I never have sold anything, but I know how to make change, and I don't believe I shall do anything very wrong. Aren't the prices all marked?"

"Yes; in my plainest hand. But I hate to have you indoors when I know you and your friends must have some jolly plan for this afternoon."

"I haven't a plan, so please let me stay," Rose urged.

"Well," assented Miss Emmy doubtfully, and then, forcing herself to great briskness, "come into the shop, then, and let me show you where a few of the things are."

She led the way and pointed out some of the most essential articles; then she opened a drawer. "Here are some dress-goods. Isn't this pretty?" She took out a material striped in blue and white. "It's a remnant, and Eunice got it very cheap. I washed a little bit of it and it didn't fade a mite,

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and it will wear forever. There's just about enough of it for a girl of nine or ten." Miss Emeline hung it over the back of a chair, and Rose made mental notes as to what she should say to a customer about it.

"Oh, here's the khaki-colored material you thought you'd have. See, I tucked the style-book in there with a picture of the farmerette suit." Miss Eunice turned the pages with a practiced hand. "Can't you see yourself leaning on a hoe and looking just like that?"

"Goodness, no! I hope I'm not such a floppy-looking individual. But I like the dress just as well as I did at first; which is a relief, because I was afraid it wouldn't look the same to me."

"Are you a changeable sort of person?"

"I suppose I am. At home they never seem to expect me to stick to anything very long."

"Oh, now you're not putting the proper value on yourself, I'm sure." Miss Emeline regarded Rose keenly, and then shook her head. "No! You can't make me believe you're anybody's weathercock. Not with those steady eyes and that firm chin. Of course any sensible person changes her mind sometimes; particularly when she's made it up wrong the first time. That's progress, you know." She turned to close the drawer, but Rose forestalled her.

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"Please, please go and lie down, and I'll put these away. I—I'd like to look at them and plan, but you're not to be bothered with them to-day."

"Wait till I've had forty winks and then see." Miss Emmy was rebellious, but she departed, nevertheless, and Rose went into the sitting-room with her to make sure that she was comfortable. Five minutes later she closed the sitting-room door softly and came back into the shop, where the sunshine was having a rainbow game with the glass candy-jars on the shelves.

"My! Lissy would like this," she thought at once, as her eyes wandered around the room in search of the shimmering patches of color. She sat down on a stool behind the counter, but jumped up again hastily to get the duster. On the other side of the shop the bright sunshine was showing up dust which the tired little lady had missed seeing. After that she found more dust. Finally she tucked the duster back again, and once more perched herself on the stool.

"I suppose I ought to have shaken that duster," she meditated, and then decided to wait, because if she opened the shop-door, the bell would ring and might wake Miss Emmy. Then it occurred to her that this would be likely to happen if anyone came in; so, finding nothing better to use, she got out

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the duster again, and standing on the stool muffled the bell.

Then she took a leisurely survey of the contents of the show-case, and, that over, glanced at the clock to find, to her surprise, that only half an hour—worse still, only twenty-seven and a half minutes had gone by since she had shut the door upon Miss Emmy.

She picked up the style-book and studied the picture of the floppy farmerette, as she mentally called her. She decided that it wouldn't be so very hard to make that costume. She remembered that it didn't look quite so stylish on Miss Eunice, but, of course, it made a big difference who wore it, and she was calmly certain that she would suit it better than Miss Eunice did. She yawned and looked at the clock. Seven more minutes gone!

Then there was a listless turning of the pages until she came to one in color—pretty, summery dresses for children of all ages. The children themselves were doll-like creatures, all except one, who reminded her of Lissy; that is, of Lissy as she might look if she were prettily dressed. The fashion-child's dress was made of a striped goods trimmed with a plain color—suddenly Rose lifted her eyes to the chair where the blue and white material still hung.

The clock had been racing for fifteen minutes

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when she looked at it again. And just then she was conscious that someone was coming up the steps, and she jumped to her feet and went toward the door.

“Sh! Oh, I’m so glad it’s you, Archie. Sh!” she said even before the door was open.

“Hello! I ——” began Archie, but got no farther, for, dislodged by the opening of the door, the duster with which Rose had muffled the bell dropped and enveloped his head in a surprisingly efficient way. It was a large, clinging duster, and contact with it made him sneeze uncontrollably.

“Sh! Please be quiet. I do so want Miss Emeline to sleep,” begged Rose.

“Hr-r-rash! Ah-kish-shoo!” responded Archie, trying ineffectually to pull off the shrouding folds. “Why don’t you—hr-r-rash!—help a fellow?” In his misery he let go of the door, which closed with a loud jangling of its bell.

“Oh, I didn’t want that bell to ring! And please don’t sneeze so. There!” Rose pulled the cloth from his head and looked at him reproachfully.

“Great Scott! How can I help sneezing with a dusty old duster over my nose? How did it get up there anyway? Ugh! I can taste it.” He blew vigorously, and spatted his upstanding hair with both hands. “I feel as if I ought to be beaten—like a carpet,” he ended ruefully.

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"I'm sorry," Rose began with such unusual meekness that Archie softened at once. The next moment, however, she spoiled the good effect she had made by clapping her hands over her mouth and shaking with soundless laughter. "Oh, do forgive me," she said as soon as she could. "It was funny, and you look terribly fierce—and I—I thought I was so smart to put that thing up there. Glory! Suppose it had been someone—someone that really counted!"

"Well, of all ——" Archie stared at her in hurt surprise, but before she had time to realize the enormity of her last remark, the funny side of the whole thing had struck him. "You do beat the Dutch," he said when he had recovered from a prolonged chuckle. "You won't be allowed to hear the last of that for some time."

"Did you come to buy anything?" Rose became suddenly conscious of her duties as shopkeeper.

"No, I came to see you. Mrs.—Mrs.—well, anyway, one of your neighbors was in here this morning, and she heard you were here and told Anne."

"Oh, yes. Does Lissy know?"

"Not yet. She's mooning around, trying to take an interest in the rest of the family, but not succeeding very well."

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Rose felt a secret gratification, but managed to look indifferent.

"I'm almost forgetting my errand," Archie said suddenly. "We've been planning to go for a hike and I came over to get you."

"I can't go." Rose was almost violent in her decisiveness. She wanted to go so much she did not dare to give way the least little bit. For a moment she even wondered whether the forty winks Miss Emeline had planned might be almost accomplished. Then—"No, I can't go," she said again, as if the exact repetition made it more binding.

"Well, you needn't be cross about it," Archie replied amiably. "Why can't you go? Miss Emeline wouldn't mind. I'd just as soon ask her." He took a step toward the door of the sitting-room, looking as though he really meant to go in, and Rose jumped before him noiselessly.

"No, you don't. Of course she'd say I needn't stay, and that's the very reason I wouldn't ask her."

"Don't be so fierce. You scare a little delicate thing like me." Archie stretched his five feet nine and three-quarters to its fullest extent and beamed on her good-naturedly. There was something in his expression Rose could not fathom. If it had not seemed foolish to think so she would have

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guessed that he was trying to make her go, but hoped she wouldn't.

"Well, you know your father and Miss Graham have Susan and Jim with them, and they've telephoned they can't get home to supper, so the rest of us, including you, think we'll take a lunch," Archie's voice was full of pleasant possibilities, "and cook bacon and roast potatoes, and if Neil and Ellen can go I'll take my car, and—and ——" he hesitated, trying to think of something yet more tempting.

"I think you're downright mean to keep telling me how nice it's going to be when you know I can't go." Rose's voice was low, but very stern, and before he was prepared for any such action she had turned him toward the door and was pushing him strongly. "I wish you'd hike now—right out of this shop—and for all I care you may toast bacon and roast potatoes for the rest of the summer." By this time she had opened the door so gently that the bell had scarcely tinkled. "Shoo! Shoo!" she said softly.

"Say, I'm not a hen," Archie protested in an injured tone. "Anyway, now I think of it, I've got to buy something, and it's your fault that I have to spend my money so foolishly." He skilfully evaded her clutch, slid through the doorway and walked over to the counter. "I'll take this,"

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he said, indicating a candy box of the pound size.

"It's eighty cents; will you have it sent or take it with you?" responded Rose in her most capable manner. And then, as if the strangeness of it had just struck her, "What do you mean, my fault?"

Archie looked doubtful as to whether it would be best for him to explain. "Why, you see, Anne and I bet—no, that's wrong; I've got to start over again. Anne said she wouldn't make a real bet, the kind that costs money, you know, and, anyway, if she would bet, she wouldn't bet because this was a sure thing—she knew she was right. Get me?"

"No! Go on and don't be any more foolish than you can help." Rose had the air of one who hated to be trifled with, and Archie chuckled softly.

"Well, it was this way. I bet Anne a pound of chocolates that I could tease you into going on this hike, and she wouldn't bet, but she declared you wouldn't go unless someone had come to stay with Miss Emeline. She said she'd wager a fresh doughnut, and it would mean just as much faith in you as if she'd put up her whole fortune."

"Chocolates to doughnuts," remarked Rose, fondly fancying that he couldn't tell by her face how pleased she was. "Did Nan really say that—that last, or are you making it up?"

"Sure thing she said it, and now I've got to go

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back and 'fess up that she was right. Good-bye." Archie slipped out noiselessly, but a moment later he opened the door with caution and poked his head in.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that before I started over here we decided that, instead of a hike, we'd make it a home supper on the Sheldon estate. I'm going back to freeze the ice-cream, and later I'll get Ellen and Neil. We hope to have the pleasure of your company." He was gone again before she could answer.

She stooped to pick up the duster, and when she stood erect the door was opening slowly and softly, and once more Archie's head appeared.

"In spite of the fact that you've been so rude to me, I just thought I'd say I'm glad you were so stubborn," he said with a grin, and this time vanished permanently.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Rose, and started to muffle the bell again, but concluded it might not be safe. Probably Miss Emmy wouldn't want to sleep much longer, and the shop didn't seem very popular this afternoon. She thought of Archie's visit with a smile. "What would he have done if I'd said I would go?" she asked herself. "I'd have made him carry out his plan. That was dear of Anne to feel so sure I wouldn't desert Miss Emeline. I'm glad I didn't let her down."

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In the next hour she sold candy twice, and sewing-silk and a basket. Just after this last customer had departed, Miss Emeline appeared in a pretty lavender-sprigged gown, looking marvellously refreshed.

“My dear, thanks to you, I’m rested, and Marilla’s better. She wants to get up, but I won’t let her, because in another hour I shall have Eunice and Abbie Toms both here. And now I’m going to show you about that dress.” Before Rose could stop her she had whipped the khaki-colored material from the drawer, and was running through a collection of patterns with her expert fingers.

“Oh, Miss Emmy!” Rose put her smooth, young hand on the frail, wrinkled one. She wanted to say something and she hated to say it. Then she had a sudden vision of Lissy: the dark hair and pale skin, the big, beauty-loving eyes, the mud-colored dress in which she had last seen her. “Miss Emmy, I made up my mind wrong the first time; do you mind if I change it? That’s—‘that’s progress,’ you know.”

CHAPTER XV

NEIL GOES AWAY

"HAVE you almost finished it, Posy?" Anne had followed to the front porch as her sister was departing for the fourth day in succession. Being one of those persons who has to put through everything planned at top speed, Rose had begged for a leave of absence from the garden, and was availing herself of the chance to work with Miss Emeline's sewing-machine and under her direction.

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't ask me that." Protracted labor with a needle had made Rose irritable, and she turned to Anne with a frown. "The day after I began it Susan wanted to know if it was 'most done, and Connie has been at me every day about it. I think it will be finished this afternoon, though," she conceded, reluctant to make any promise about it.

"It's a shame you didn't make it as soon as Daddy said you could have it," Anne went on. "The worst of the garden work is over now. You'll hardly need to wear it."

"Don't you worry about its not being worn;

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there'll be plenty of chances—if I ever get it finished.” Rose’s manner was still ungracious, but she had turned away so that Anne could not see her face. “By the way, when Lissy gets here just send her over, will you? I want to see her about something.”

“Well, you’re certainly not letting us have the care of her,” Anne said admiringly. “She’s been there every day.”

“Miss Emeline’s teaching her to sew. I guess she thinks that part of her education will be neglected if it’s left to me,” Rose explained with a laugh. “Lissy has the cleverest fingers you ever saw. She made a perfectly corking doll’s bonnet yesterday, out of scraps of silk and velvet and a dab of lace. Miss Emeline thinks she can be trained to be a milliner. Poor Lissy! Fancy sitting still all day and poking a needle in and out.”

“Perhaps she’d like it,” Anne demurred. “Are you coming home to dinner, Rose, to-day?”

“I don’t believe so. Miss Emmy teases me to stay, and it saves time. I suppose you’re laughing at me for being so neighborly, but I don’t care.”

“I’m not either.” Anne was forcible in her denial. “Of course you didn’t think you would be neighborly, but that was before you got here. Naturally, anyone may change her mind.”

“Sure thing!” Rose whirled around looking sur-

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prisingly cheerful. "I've turned mine topsy-turvy a million times since I've been here. But changing your mind when you've made it up wrong the first time is progress. Oh, you needn't look so surprised at my wisdom—that's borrowed. Miss Emmy said it, and I've decided she knows pretty nearly everything. Well, good-bye. I mustn't stay here talking if I want to finish that dress."

Rose started off at a rapid pace, but after a little went more slowly, because the July sun seemed to be trying to tell her that hurrying was a bad thing.

"I suppose in the city the heat is terrible," she said to herself. "I'm sure that in Melford we should be sitting around with fans and thinking we didn't want to do anything. Here it's only a little more than pleasantly warm."

In her pink dress and big white hat she looked the embodiment of summer. Quite unconsciously her eyes were taking in the beauty of the distant hills, of the wooded stretches, dappled by sunshine and shadow, of the near field, where the wheat was rippled by a passing breeze. Involuntarily she stopped and gazed, and felt vaguely stirred by the loveliness of it all. For a fleeting moment she seemed a part of it; she was the soft wind ruffling the wheat; she was the bright air; she was the gay butterfly fluttering by on painted wing.

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In the next breath she was conscious of the dusty road again, with its bordering stone-wall and the ordinary country shrubbery drooping in the sun. She felt queer and somewhat worried. Daddy had accused her of growing an imagination; was this a part of it, she wondered.

With a sigh she shrugged herself into her usual calm indifference toward Nature. "It is pretty here," she admitted, as she walked on a little more quickly than before. "I shall have to change my mind for the million and wunth time, and say I love it and I hope we shall come here next summer." With which wholesale giving up of her previous opinions she walked up the steps of Miss Emeline's shop, and at the welcoming jangle of the bell fell at once into a workaday mood.

The day went on, and at half-past three, after an unwonted stillness on the part of the Sheldon family, Susan came out on the front porch. Ordinarily she refused to take any time for rest, but to-day she had had an absorbing morning with the Becker twins, and then had gratified her family by falling asleep directly after dinner. Now, rested, tubbed and freshly clothed, she had been sent out with urgent instructions to keep clean and cool until Anne and Connie should join her.

She scrutinized the top step and then sat down with her crisp dress spreading out around her like

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the corolla of a flower. Susan hated to be responsible for a clean, pretty dress like this, and she wondered why she had asked to wear it this afternoon. She had not dreamed that Anne would let her wear it on just a plain every-day, but Anne had said she might as well, because it would soon be too small for her. Which meant, Susan told herself exultantly, that she should soon be too big for it.

"Everyone has to be still and careful sometimes," she thought with a yawn. She smoothed the protruding folds of her dress and surveyed with satisfaction her recently-cleaned white shoes. It was in her mind that Jimsey would be home soon from the drive he was taking with Ellis and Roger, and she was hoping that he would be dusty and dishevelled. "Anyway, when he sees me looking so—so spick and spandy I guess it'll make him feel dirty," she meditated. Often Jimsey said scolding things to her about her hands and face, and did not want her to get too close to him while he was drawing.

It was lonesome out here on the steps. She wished Anne and Connie would hurry. She could not see why big girls should fuss so much about hair and hands and finger-nails. "Ears are the worst," she mused. "If they spend as much time looking into their own ears as they do into mine they'll never get out here."

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To Susan it seemed an astonishingly still afternoon, and she began to dislike sitting here alone with no one passing to see how unusually clean she looked. She half decided that she would go around to the side porch where she could see the garden. She could think of many things she would do if she were not so clean.

“If I went out there Jimsey wouldn’t see me right spang off,” she thought with a sigh. “There’s Rose and Lissy, too; p’raps they’ll come soon and they’ll see me looking so pretty. I guess I can stick it out right here.”

She shut her lips firmly and arranged her dress again. Then she turned her toes out, and afterwards tried the effect of turning them in; finally she crossed her ankles and folded her hands.

After a while the sound of running water struck her ear, and standing up to investigate, she found that somebody had left the hose on the front lawn, and it was running gently.

“I b’lieve that careless Jimsey left that hose there,” Susan said aloud. It was a sore point with her that Jim was permitted to use the hose, while she was not even allowed to touch it. “Daddy always says it didn’t ought to be left in one place a long time.”

She went down the steps and stood looking at the long hose, the nozzle of which was lying in the

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grass some distance away. A small stream of water was wetting the ground in one spot just as Susan had supposed.

"I could walk out there—and hold it 'way off from me—and turn off that water just as easy," she said slowly, illustrating with her small clean hands just how she meant to do it.

"P'raps nobody will come for a long, long time." From her tone one would have guessed that it might be years. "I can't see anyone coming." She glanced at the sky and then at the ground, as if a possible helper might fall down or spring up, and she quite failed to notice that in the distance Mr. Bonaparte was approaching with his usual brisk home-coming gait. Then she took a tentative step into the grass and lifted her foot to see the result. The white shoe was still clean and perfectly dry, and her face brightened.

"'Course Anne didn't mean I should sit still when there was something like this that ought to be done," she said softly, and straightway walked in the direction of the nozzle.

Just as she reached it, fate, which pulls the strings of chance so queerly, made several things happen at the same time: Anne and Connie came out on the porch looking expectantly for Susan; Mr. Bonaparte deposited Roger and Jimsey on the sidewalk, and was driven to the barn by Ellis; from

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another direction Archie and Mr. Pearson came speedily, and stopped the car in front of the house.

Absorbed in her own excellent intentions, Susan was oblivious to this gathering of friends and relatives, but became acutely conscious all at once that her cherished shoes were squishing in soaked grass. Nevertheless, she was sternly determined to accomplish what she had come for and to do it without wetting her dress. Hating to go further in the wet grass she leaned and stretched and finally grasped the hose at some little distance back of the nozzle.

At exactly that instant Anne called sharply, "Oh, Susan, don't touch that hose! Come away!"

Startled from her toes up, Susan swayed and nearly fell forward, but recovered her balance with a jerk which flapped the nozzle in her direction, and sent the stream of water straight into her face and neck.

"Wow!" she gasped as soon as she could get her breath. "I'm dwooning!" It did not occur to her, however, to drop the hose; she only fumbled blindly, trying to turn it off.

"Oh, Jimsey, take it away from her," begged Anne, but it was Roger who first responded to her call and went leaping across the lawn.

Susan greeted him with a joyous shout. "I've found out how you turn it," she cried, whirling in his direction, and doing something to the nozzle

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which caused a stream three times as powerful as the previous one to hit Roger full in the chest.

"Oh, 'scuse me; I turned it the wrong way," she apologized, and flopped it again, this time almost knocking over Jimsey, who had thought to execute a flank movement.

"Drop it! Drop it! You little goose," he spluttered, making a wild dash for it, and unintentionally pushing the nozzle straight upward, so that in its fall the water descended upon all three of them.

"Huh!" retorted Susan. "Who's a goose now? I'll turn it off," and she did it upon the instant. "That's what I came over here to do," she ended with righteous scorn as she started toward the house. She was dripping from head to foot, but there was a spirited gleam in her eye, and deep within her the guilty consciousness of having enjoyed it all.

"Oh, Susan, you know ——"

"Yes, I know I'm not 'lowed to touch the hose," Susan broke in, shivering as the cool water trickled down her neck. "You can make me go right in and take off this dress and these shoes. That'll be a punishment—a great big punishment for me." She was so afraid that Anne would say she must go to bed that she hastened to provide another penalty. "You can make me put on my oldest play-dress," she suggested hopefully, and then, be-

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cause she knew this would be no real punishment, added, "you can tell me to keep all by myself, and not to—not to come near the fambly."

Anne's spirit caught a message from Susan's which told her that this last was the thing that counted. "Very well, then. Remember that you're to stay somewhere in the garden, but you're not to come near the family—no matter what happens," she decreed soberly. "Now go in and ask Effie very politely if she'll help you change your clothes."

Susan looked hopefully at Connie and then at Archie, as if half expecting that they would intercede for her. Then she tilted her head defiantly and walked straight into the house.

"It wouldn't be any punishment for me to change my clothes," Roger said plaintively. "How 'bout it, Jim?"

"Same here. Come on up and we'll find some dry togs," answered Jim with a manly air. And then Ellis, coming in from the barn, took Roger off up-stairs with him.

Five minutes later Ellen and Miss Graham appeared, with Neil in his chair pushed by the devoted Hegan. Anne marshalled them around to the side porch, which was cooler and more capacious, and to her joy, found her father there. Miss Graham was eager to show to him and Mr. Pearson a letter she

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had received from a critical reader of one of her articles, and in two minutes the three of them were deep in a discussion. Archie sat on the railing beside Neil's chair and began to describe to him and Ellen Susan's latest escapade, so Anne slipped into the kitchen, where she found Connie already getting out glasses.

"I knew you'd want it," Connie said briefly. "Wasn't it lucky we made that fresh syrup this morning? It'll only take a jiffy to get this ready."

After a while Roger came down the back stairs, feeling self-conscious in borrowed clothes. "Let Connie and me do this, Anne," he begged, "and you go on out. Perhaps I'll get used to myself by the time the tray has to be carried out."

Anne agreed and left them. A few minutes later Ellis and Jimsey went out of the front door in search of the family and were drawn by the sound of voices to the side porch. At the same time a small figure in a faded dress paused on its way across the kitchen to give a despairing glance at the festive preparations. Roger wanted to tuck a cooky into Susan's hand, but she shook her head mutely and went into the garden.

"Where's Rose?" asked Jean Graham, as Ellis sprang to place a table for the tray Roger was bringing. "I miss Rose."

"She's at Miss Emeline's finishing her farmer-

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ette dress. She'll be here soon, I hope, and show it to us," explained Anne, resolving that she would tell Rose what Miss Graham had said. "Do you mind pouring the lemonade? Ellis seems to have put the table nearest you."

"Why—I thought she looked—well, as if she could do it nicely," Ellis said, and then feeling unusually brave added, "That's an awfully pretty dress you've got on, Miss Graham. I—I like to see you pouring lemonade on our porch."

"Thank you, Ellis. That's the nicest compliment I've had in a long time. Isn't there something I can do for you?"

"You might give me more sugar," Ellis accepted promptly. "The girls never make it sweet enough for me."

"Good reason why, old bear," said Connie, giving him a tap as she passed with the cooky-plate. "It would be too sweet for everyone else if we did."

"I'll put the cookies back," offered Jimsey, and took the plate from his sister's hand. Then under cover of this errand, he sidled around the table and said shyly, so that no one but Miss Graham could hear, "I think you look very nice—and I don't want any extra sugar, either." He slipped back to his perch on the railing before she could answer, but the first time he dared to look at her he got an understanding smile, to which he bashfully re-

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sponded, and then turned his head toward the garden.

Out near the tall hollyhocks something caught his eye. It was Susan, with a piece of cheese-cloth flung around one shoulder and held daintily in her finger-tips. "Will you look at Susan?" Jimsey said with a chuckle, and as the others followed the direction of his finger, Susan's voice, which on occasions could be powerful, came distinctly to their ears.

"Oh, I am so happy, so-o happy, so ha-a-a-py," she sang, whirling dizzily, and holding the fluttering cheese-cloth as high as her arms could reach.

"Banished?" asked Mr. Sheldon, looking at Anne.

"Banished," answered Anne firmly, though she looked disturbed.

"Ha-ap-py like a bird," warbled Susan, apparently reaching her top note on the last word. In some mysterious way she seemed to realize that she had attracted the attention of her family, and she whirled faster, and made strange movements with her arms.

"Oh, the poor little kid," said Archie. "She means just the opposite to what she says. Mayn't I go out and get her, Anne? Or take out some lemonade?"

"No," said Anne, hating to seem so hard-

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hearted, but sure she was right. "You see, Daddy had told her positively not to touch the hose," she explained to Miss Graham and Ellen, "and she set her own punishment."

"Yes, but she didn't know there were going to be 'eats,'" persisted Archie. "You might let me ——"

But Anne was shaking her head before he had finished. "It's nice of you to want to do it, but this is her third adventure with the hose, and I mustn't give in." It was greatly to her relief at that moment to hear Rose and Lissy talking as they came around from the front of the house, and she got up, meaning to meet them and tell her sister who was here. Rose did not like surprises.

Before she could carry out her intention, Rose's voice sent a greeting ahead. "Hello, folkses, where are you? Please get together to meet my new gown," and the next minute she appeared at the end of the porch, smiling, flushed, and looking her prettiest, but dressed just as her sister had seen her when she went away that morning.

Anne looked her astonishment. "Why, I thought—I thought ——" she began, and then her glance found Lissy, radiant in a dress of blue and white which charmingly set off her dusky hair and sparkling eyes.

"It ees *my* dress, Miss Anne. She have made

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it for me. You can know that, because it ees the—the exactly right for me. See, Miss Ellen, it have pockets ——” Lissy was darting from one to another to point out the beauties of her new treasure.

Rose, not yet recovered from the surprise of finding so many, felt sure it must seem to Miss Graham and the others that she was anxious to show off her good deeds before the world. For an instant the urgent need of explaining that she did not know they were there oppressed her; then the sight of Daddy, stretching out his hand in congratulation, with a look of pride in her which she could not mistake, dispelled her worry. After all it did not matter about her part of it as long as Lissy had her dress.

“Daddy, how do you like it?” she questioned eagerly. “Father was the only one who knew,” she added, turning to Miss Graham, “and he’s grown so absent-minded over the article he’s writing that I expected any day to have him ask me about Lissy’s dress right before Anne. He tries so hard to take an interest in our secrets, don’t you, Daddy?” She gave him a little hug in passing, and went to sit beside Ellen and Neil, whom she hadn’t seen for two days.

“Father never even hinted,” said Anne. “I—I think you are wonderful, Posy. Come, Lissy, let’s show Miss Graham how pretty it is.”

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“I shall take it off before I go,” observed Lissy, gloating over the dress. “But it shall go wiz me in a paper. I have telled the women over in Mill Hollow that I will put it on for to viseet them eef they make the room clean for me. This so beautiful dress cannot go into a dirty room.” She smoothed it gently, and there was a touching pride in her eyes. “Now, since yesterday, when I have telled them eet is mos’ fineeshed, they scr-r-ub,” she ended simply.

“Lissy, you must tell that to Miss Dean. You’re a born reformer,” Jean Graham said, and then she examined the new dress, commenting on all its beauties to the child’s intense delight.

Later, when the conversation had drifted to other subjects, Roger interrupted suddenly by saying under his breath, “Look at Lissy now. She’s showing off for Susan.”

Like a model in a fashion show, Lissy was walking up and down at the far end of the porch, pretending to have no idea that Susan’s sturdy figure was almost within reach. Once in a while she cast an indifferent glance in that direction, to see if she were being observed, but for the most part she ignored the small person who stood watching.

Susan, intensely lonely in spirit, had crept as near her family as she thought she could without breaking her promise to Anne. But with the ar-

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rival of Lissy, resplendent in a new dress, apparently much admired by everyone, bitterness had entered the heart of the outcast. It was not so long ago that she had been clean and beautiful, and no one had come to admire her until it was too late.

She picked up a tiny pebble and tossed it lightly in the direction of Lissy's proudly-stepping feet, at the same time saying in a low voice, "It isn't so pretty as my dress."

Lissy jumped with an affectation of fright. "Oh," she called piercingly, "Mees Rose, come queeck! The little Susan she have throwed a rock at me. And she tell me that my dress is not so pretty as hers." She paused to glare at Susan, then went on excitedly, "Look at this so lovely dress and then at hers. I ask you ——" her chin quivered, and she burst into sobs broken by unintelligible words.

Anne reached the end of the porch first. "Why, Susan, what made you ——"

"'Twasn't a wock," Susan interrupted, glad in her inmost heart to be the centre of family interest again. "It was a little squinchy pebble as big as this," she held up the tip of her smallest finger. "And I meant my beautiful white dress, not this one."

"Susan, it was mean of you to say that when you could see how happy Lissy was," scolded Rose.

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And then, in desperation, "Now, Lissy, brace up and don't cry. I'm afraid you'll spot your dress."

"Oh, I will brace up," moaned Lissy, taking the danger to her dress seriously, and poking her head out like a turtle so that the tears would fall on the porch floor.

"Where's your hanky, kid?" said Ellis. "Here, wait a jiffy ——" he fumbled in his pockets.

"I like not to use my—my new one that Mees Emmy have give me," she explained, looking at him piteously, and holding up her face to be wiped. "I might spot it."

Rose had an inspiration. "Excuse me," she said to the others, then drew Lissy aside and talked to her in a low tone. To those watching, the child's delicate, changeful face was a revealing picture of her mind. Finally she clapped her hands. "Yes! Yes!" she said, "I will do eet. But first I must ——" she stood on tiptoe to whisper, and Rose bent her head and nodded agreement.

"Ex-kee-use-me," the child murmured, in imitation of her beloved Miss Rose, and darted into the house.

Five minutes later she returned clad in the mud-colored dress which they all so disliked. "If I am to take lemonade and cakes to the small Susan I am better so, is it not?" she asked anxiously of Archie, who was nearest her.

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"I should say as much. But perhaps Miss Anne won't let you do that; she won't let me."

"Lissy may," answered Anne, who in the interval had found out Rose's plan. "Two glasses and the plate of cookies; can you carry all that, Lissy? And be kind to Susan; she isn't feeling very happy."

"I will be good to her," Lissy promised solemnly, and taking the tray, departed with the air of one who goes on an errand of mercy.

"That's settled," said Rose with a sigh of relief. "Susan may not be very keen about Lissy, but she can't resist cakes and lemonade." She turned, meaning to go and talk to Neil, who, up to this time, had been monopolized by the boys. She had fancied once or twice that he and Ellen were both very quiet this afternoon, and seemed in some indescribable way different from usual. Before she reached Neil's chair, however, Miss Graham said they must go, and there was a confusion of eager protests and explanations, in the midst of which Rose was seized by Ellen and pushed gently out of hearing of the others.

"Oh, Rose," Ellen said breathlessly, "I've just got to tell someone that Neil and I are going away to-morrow, and we shan't be back for—well, for some weeks, anyway."

Rose stared blankly, and then Ellen's worried

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eyes made her guess the meaning of it all. "Is—is it what you told me about?" she asked.

"Yes. Neil means to slip away and let Cousin Jean tell you after we've gone. She isn't going with us, because we are to be at the surgeon's house. She won't come unless—unless ——" Ellen turned her head away and stared at the blossoming garden.

"It would be silly for me to pretend that I don't know what you mean," Rose answered, and somehow her directness helped to steady Ellen. "But I don't believe for one millionth part of a minute that there will be any need for Miss Graham to go." It was a triumph to put such comforting conviction into a half-whisper, and Ellen brightened and spoke more calmly.

"Of course you don't know anything about it, but I love to have you so firm. I—I've been bottled up ever since the word came"—for an instant she struggled with herself again—"I'm glad I told you. I'm less likely to spill over before Neil now. Don't tell, will you, until ——" she stopped suddenly, because some of the others were just behind them.

A moment later Rose slipped away, hoping that her face did not show that a dreadful secret had been entrusted to her keeping, and in her absorption almost walked over Miss Graham.

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"Rose, that dress is fine," Jean Graham said quickly. "I believe you've done more for Lissy than you suspect, and I think you are wonderful to have put it through so quickly in this warm weather."

"Thank you. I—I think so, too," stammered Rose, keeping an eye on Mr. Pearson and Roger, who were wheeling Neil off the porch, and wondering what it was Miss Graham had said, and whether she had answered properly. Then as she saw Neil left alone while the others went in search of Hegan, she said, "Oh, please excuse me if I run away. I must speak to Neil before he—he goes."

What she was going to say to him she did not know, but she was certain she couldn't let him go without a word. In her anxious haste she had to pull up short to avoid running into the wheel-chair. "Hello! I'm on the earth and to be seen by passers-by," Neil said, grinning up at her in his usual friendly fashion, quite as if nothing strange and unpleasant were going to happen.

"Oh, excuse me. I was coming so fast that ——"

"You didn't put on the brakes soon enough. I've heard that you are the accelerator of the Sheldon Six, but I didn't know you carried it so far as to run over your friends."

"That's Anne's joke—not mine." Rose was inclined to treat the idea of the imaginary family car

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with scorn, but now she would have been glad to talk about it.

"You're some dressmaker; that dress of Lissy's is a dandy. I wouldn't have believed that awful-looking child could be almost a beauty."

"She is pretty." Rose was finding it increasingly difficult to say anything.

"Rose, you're a bluffer. You talk a lot about not having patience and then you surprise us with something like this. If you"—he paused and his face was very sober—"if you came up against any big thing I bet you'd go through with it like a breeze."

"Oh, I don't know what I should do," sighed Rose. "But I feel absolutely sure, Neil"—Hegan was coming, and whatever she had to say must be said now—"I'm as sure as that I stand here that you'll always buck up against—against trouble, and come through with"—she searched desperately for the right words—"with flying colors."

"You know? Ellen told you?"

Rose nodded. "I didn't mean to give it away, but I just had to let you know that I'm betting on you; remember, it's to be all flags flying."

Neil's face flushed, and his eyes looked happier. "I'm glad Ellen told you," he hurried to say, and then Hegan put his hands on the back of the chair and they moved off.

CHAPTER XVI

A CAMEL AND A PINK RABBIT

THIS was the sixth day after Neil's departure, and they were talking about him as they sat on the front porch after dinner. Archie and Roger had just driven over, Anne was in the hammock, Ellis on the railing, and Rose had dropped down on the steps.

"Glory! I just can't wait to hear whether he's going to be able to walk again like the rest of us," Ellis burst out. "These telegrams that don't dare to say much of anything get on my nerves."

"There comes Miss Graham now," said Roger, and in spite of the heat Susan and Jim started on the run to meet her. "Perhaps she'll have some real news."

"She's got something white in her hand," Connie announced, and the next minute Jean Graham waved it jubilantly, and they could all see it was a letter.

"I could scarcely wait to get here," she said, settling herself beside Anne in the hammock, and

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then with a sigh, "After all, we can't tell by this whether what we most want is going to happen, but it's better than a telegram."

Ellen wrote that the surgeons had found the injury just what they had expected—a fragment of bone pressing on the spinal cord and preventing motion; that the patient was doing well, and that his fine courage would be a help in whatever success might come; that there were reasons to think the results might be all they hoped.

"But," added poor Ellen, "they are all so terribly cautious. Not one of them will promise me anything. We've just got to wait and see. So please write, and ask the Sheldons to write, and the Bradleys, too. All of you—as often as you can. Neil will love the letters, and the days are long."

"Rose and I started off some letters yesterday," said Anne. "Let's write every day, Posy, even if it's only a little; it's so nice to have notes dropping in."

Ellis and Archie looked at each other, and the latter said, "Every day! Great Scott! Isn't that just like a girl?"

"We're up against it, Arch," Ellis responded gloomily. "What say to going over to Neil's club-ground? Perhaps Pete and some of the others will be around, and there'll be something doing we can write about."

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“ ‘I’m wid yer,’ as Reddy says. We might take over the tools and put up that bar.”

“Right you are,” agreed Ellis, and they strolled off to the barn together to get the tools.

“I’ll send my first letter to-night,” Roger said. He had begun without waiting to be urged, and was writing a serial, illustrated by sketches and snapshots, and to be sent in daily installments. “I’m going to call it ‘Life on the Sheldon Farm—or a Rose Without Thorns.’”

“I don’t see why you pick on me that way,” objected Rose, who instantly disapproved of this title, and resented having pictures taken at her worst moments. “You make me tired snapping me when I least expect it.”

“You didn’t think I meant you, did you?” Roger laughed. “You’ve got some thorns of your own, I should say. That title just popped into my head; it doesn’t mean anything. Titles often don’t, as far as I can see. But you have to get one that—that tickles the ear.”

“Humph! That one doesn’t tickle my ear, and I should think some of those snapshots would make Neil worse.”

“They’re not so bad,” Roger defended, and just then he saw Archie and Ellis coming by on their way to the club. “Hold on! I guess I’ll go too,” he said with a yawn. “There were some things

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Ramsay was talking about ——” he left his sentence unfinished, and stepped over the porch railing to join them.

“Wait a second,” called Jimsey, “I’m going to take over my bat and ball and teach some of the littlest kids.”

“Let me! Let me!” began Susan, but Ellis put up a warning hand. “That’ll be about all from you,” he said soberly. “No girls allowed this trip.” And then, feelingly, to his brother, “Get a move on, youngster. It’s too hot to stand still and wait.”

Rose agreed with him silently. She had spent the morning in the garden, and now, in this hottest part of a warm day, felt like nothing so much as sitting just where she was on the steps, with her head against a pillar and her eyelids deliciously droopy. Not that she was comfortable—far from it. The steps were hard, and on the fluted pillar were sharp edges that poked into her head; but if she moved a sixteenth of an inch she might lose this delightful drowsiness.

“Miss Jean and I are going up-stairs, Rose; don’t you want to come?” Anne invited.

“No, thanks,” murmured Rose without stirring, and forebore to quote the ancient remark about three and a crowd, though it occurred to her as appropriate. She wondered if she could get into the hammock which the others were just leaving with-

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out waking herself entirely. It might be worth trying.

“Why don’t you take the hammock, Rose?” suggested Jean Graham. “You look sleepy.”

“No, thanks,” answered Rose again in the same indifferent tone, deciding immediately that all she wanted was to keep perfectly still. After a while, however, as the pillar continued to dig into the back of her head, and no one was there to see, she got up and bestowed herself comfortably in the hammock.

“You’re so contrary that if you were a girl I knew, or one in a story, I’d think you were a silly ‘it,’ ” she told herself with sleepy scorn. “I—do think so—anyway ——” and then, for a drowsy moment, she was aware of a perfumed breeze, and of a soft, droning murmur in the honeysuckle near her; after that stillness enfolded her world.

Later Lissy arrived, found Rose and gazed at her adoringly without making a sound. Then she went into the garden, where Susan, somewhat lonely this afternoon, welcomed her with unwonted enthusiasm.

From deep slumber Rose was suddenly precipitated into a dream in which wild beasts snarled and cried out in voices strangely human, and she came to herself in a hurry because the hammock was pulled and shaken almost to the point of turning her out.

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“For goodness’ sake, what’s happening to me?” she demanded, sitting up and blinking at an enraged Susan, and at Lissy, who looked more frightened than angry.

“When I wanted her to keep still—not to wake you—she have shook the—the bed like this.” Lissy illustrated with such force that Rose came fully awake now and clutched at the hammock.

“She—she’s got my camel,” retorted Susan, scowling at Lissy. “And I saw her hide Jimsey’s paint-box so she could take it home with her.”

“I have not ——” began Lissy, and could not go farther with Rose’s eyes upon her. “I have put the color-box of Jeem where the small Susan could not touch it,” she went on in her most appealing manner. “Jeem, he lets me use it, because I am careful. He cannot bear the—the so great sploshiness of—of children.”

“I’m not a child,” snapped Susan. “And you were going to take it away—you do take things—and you’ve got my camel.” Her face was flushed, and she turned on Lissy with the apparent purpose of doing her bodily injury. Susan was so big for her age and Lissy so small for hers that Rose felt it wise to stand between them.

“Don’t slap and kick,” she said curtly to Susan. “Animals scratch and bite, because they don’t know any better, but you’re a girl.”

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Lissy gave her a worshipful glance and spoke firmly. "I also am a girl, and I will no more fight weeth my hands and—and my teeth if you say so."

"If I say so! Of course I do. And now where's the camel?"

The sudden question was unexpected, and Lissy turned pale. Her mouth opened, but no words came, and she could only stare helplessly.

"Where is it?" Rose persisted. "You took it, didn't you?"

"Ye-es. I took heem, but not for to keep." The child fumbled with both hands at the buttons on the back of her dress, and presently drew from its temporary hiding-place a small bronze camel which someone had given Susan. She passed a slim finger over the animal's queer back, and apparently quite forgetting her sins, murmured absently, "Beautifool—he is beautifool."

"Ho! His back is all crooked. How can he be beautiful?" In her anxiety to disagree, Susan forgot that, for the moment, this was one of her most cherished possessions, and that Lissy had done her a grievous wrong.

"I do not mean that he is good to look at." Lissy was struggling to express herself, and again she traced the contour of the animal with her finger. "Look!" she said at last, and she set the bronze camel on the porch railing and stood away to gaze

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at it. "It is because this little theeng is made so beautifool that I like it. Jeem have telled me that this animal is called the 'sheep of the desert'; he showed me pictures of many camels. The person who have made this small theeng knew much. I think he smells water, this one, after being veree thirsty."

In spite of lack of exercise, Rose's imagination responded to Lissy's words. Staring at the little figure on the railing, her vision broadened to take in the sand-swept desert with a line of burdened camels disappearing in the distance. Then her eyes focussed on the bronze camel again. It really was well made, she supposed, but it was queer that a child like Lissy should be so impressed by that part of it.

"Well, all the same, it isn't yours," she said flatly, once more solidly on earth again, "and you've no right to take it unless Susan says you may."

"No, indeedy," added Susan, and there was that in her manner which asserted that it would be a long day before she should give any such permission.

A shadow fell over Lissy's illumined face. "I promeese," she said sorrowfully, "that I will take no things that are to the small Susan any more."

"Nor to the small Jim, either," amended Susan

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hastily. If she must be called by that hated name Jimsey should share it.

“ I will get the color-box,” Lissy said meekly, her dark eyes searching Rose’s face. “ I will not touch heem again—until Jeem shall say so. But Jeem, he is deeferent; he love, like me, to draw, to make the painting, to ——” she stopped, startled, as if she had been going to say something she should prefer not to say. “ Shall I bring the color-box to you or put heem away? ”

“ We’ll take care of that later. Now I want to talk to you.”

Lissy’s face was sober and somewhat apprehensive. Even Susan squirmed uneasily, and thought her sister’s voice sounded very stern.

“ Lissy, you know the handkerchief Miss Emeline gave you to go with your new dress? ”

“ Yes, I know heem.” Lissy’s answer was scarcely more than a frightened whisper. As if she held it in her hand she could see this cherished treasure with its pretty pink border; she wondered if Mees Rose might be going to say that she must give it back again.

“ What should you think, Lissy, if some girl over in Mill Hollow liked that handkerchief very much and should take it away from you? ”

“ Theenk! ” exploded Lissy, in a voice quite different from her sighing whisper, “ I should not stop

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to theenk; she would be a robber—I should beat her.” And then more quietly, “The handkerchief is mine; eet was give to me.”

“And the camel is Susan’s; it was given to her. Do you want her to call you a robber and beat you?”

“If the small Susan did that and was not the sister of you ——” Lissy began with grim warning in her glance, and then she looked startled. “It ees not the exact same, is eet?” she asked with a perplexed frown, “the girl who take my handkerchief, and that I—I borrow the camel of Susan?”

“When we borrow things we first ask for them, and when we’ve used them we give them back,” said Rose. “Or, if we don’t, we ought to,” she hastened to add.

“Yes, but I have wanted to make a picture of this camel, and if I ask Susan she would not let me to borrow eet.”

“That doesn’t make any difference.” Rose was getting a bit tired of this prolonged argument and she spoke decidedly. “If there’s anything you need that we don’t give you, you must find out whose it is and ask if you may have it. Never take anything that isn’t yours and hide it away; that’s sneaky.”

“I do not like to be snikky.” Lissy was impressed by the scorn in her idol’s voice, and in mute

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dejection she put the little camel in Susan's hands. Then she became thoughtful. "Does everytheeng in this house belong to somebody?" she asked. "The tables and chairs, the butter and bread, the—the theengs in the room where the beeg water is?" A faint color stole into her face as if this last held the importance of the question.

"Why, of course. All of those things belong either to Miss Anne or to my father. And it isn't just this house that you must remember about. It's wherever you may be and for all your life; don't take what doesn't belong to you. Do you understand?" Rose hammered in the moral lesson with a decision that made both her hearers blink.

"I theenk I do; you mean that in the whole world I am not to take what isn't mine—not to be snikky."

"That's it exactly. And now I'm going into the house. Susan, can you and Lissy be friendly and play together?"

"I s'pose so," drawled Susan, looking askance at her late enemy. She was somewhat puzzled as to how the whole affair had come out. To be sure she had got back her camel, but he was a hard, unsatisfactory animal that absolutely refused to be cuddled; neither did it give her any of the joy she had seen in Lissy's face to put him on the porch railing and stare at him. Anyway, Lissy looked

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as if she had been punished, so perhaps she would be easier to play with now. "Well, come on," she said ungraciously. And then, with mounting enthusiasm, "Let's get some skirts and play lady."

"I'll find some you can use," Rose hastened to add, and with the trouble apparently healed, they all went into the house together.

Later in the afternoon, when a breath of coolness was stealing into the air, Archie and Ellis came speeding back to the house in the automobile and found the family assembled on the east porch.

"We-all want you-all to come to supper at our house," Archie said at once. "We've got to have a party, because Uncle has sent up a box of stuff by special delivery, and most of it is perishable. He must have got the idea that we're starving."

"There won't be any left to perish if you put the Sheldons on the job," encouraged Ellis. "Only lead us to it."

"Will you come, Miss Graham? And Mr. Sheldon? And Anne and Rose and Connie?" Archie continued. "Would you ——"

"I'm a Sheldon Six, too," interrupted Susan, coming up behind him with a great swishing of her train. "Wouldn't you care to have me come?"

"Sure, Honey. We couldn't get along without you. And where's Lissy? Perhaps she could gain a few ounces if she tried."

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"She's out in the garden sitting down. She won't play any more. She's got a gwouch, I guess." Having settled the matter of her own invitation, Susan swept along the porch, gazing over her shoulder at her train.

"I'll find her," promised Rose, serene in the agreeable consciousness that she could manage Lissy. "What was it you were going to ask when Susan interrupted?"

Archie chuckled. "Something cheeky," he admitted. "Would you mind letting me take a plate and knife and fork and spoon for each one of you?"

"Of course not," Anne answered. "Let us bring something else, won't you?"

"That's all we need, thank you. Ellis and I have got to dash 'round a bit with the car and do some shopping, and then I'll come back for you-all about five-thirty. How's that?"

It being agreed that this would suit all concerned, Anne went to get the supplies, and after the boys had gone, Rose started for the garden in search of Lissy.

She found her seated in melancholy fashion on the ground, with her knees drawn up and her head resting upon them. As Rose approached the child looked up at her, but said nothing—just waited in all patience for whatever might happen.

"Why, Lissy, what's the matter? Have you and

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Susan been scrapping again?" Rose began lightly, and then, realizing that whatever the trouble might be, it was no small thing to Lissy, she became sympathetic at once. "Don't you feel well? Did you and Susan quarrel?"

"No, the small Susan have been good," Lissy answered dully. "I theenk I shall go home—there is a feeling of badness here ——" she put her hand on her chest vaguely, as if not quite sure of the location of the unpleasantness, and raised tear-filled eyes to Rose.

"I wonder what you had for dinner," that practical young person murmured. "Have you and Susan been eating anything? Come into the house and we'll ask Effie about it."

"No! No! I do not weesh to see her." Lissy got up and looked about her nervously. "It is not a seeckness for Effie to take care of. I will go home—I cannot stay here. I ask you not to try to keep me."

She had so much the air of a small frightened animal trying to escape that Rose was both sorry for her and puzzled. "Of course I won't try to stop you if you really want to go," she said gently. "But, Lissy, I came out to tell you that Mr. Archie wants us all to come to his house for supper, and he has invited you, too. Wouldn't you like to do that?"

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The child's face brightened in response to this alluring invitation; then her eyes filled with tears again. "I cannot," she said brokenly. "I must go home." It was evident that she wanted to weep whole-heartedly, but Rose's restrictions in regard to crying had been impressive, and Lissy managed to keep the tears from falling.

"All right, then," answered Rose. "Go you shall, if you want to as much as that. Would you rather walk? If you will wait an hour you can go over in the automobile with us."

"I will walk," Lissy decided instantly, and would have started immediately, but Rose held her back.

"Listen," she said impressively, "I am sure that very soon you will feel better and you will want to come to Mr. Archie's house. If you do ask Mrs. Rand to let you go, and tell her I said we would take you home with us for over night. You may sleep on the cot in the little sewing-room, and you know you like that."

"Yes. I know I like that," Lissy repeated, with no animation in her voice. "If I feel better perhaps I come." She took a step away from Rose and then turned to her again. "You do like me a little, is it not?" she said appealingly. "You do not think I am bad—snikky?"

"Why, of course I like you. I'm getting to be very fond of you." Rose patted her shoulder, and

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then, to her own surprise, stooped to kiss the troubled face. As she stood up again she found herself hoping that Susan didn't see that.

"I feel a small bit better already," Lissy declared with a wavering smile. "Now I go."

Rose watched her across the garden and out into the road. "Now, what do you know about that?" she asked herself, as she went slowly back to the house. "I wonder if I ought to have dragged out of her what the matter is." She supposed Lissy was bound to have some feelings she would want to keep to herself; everyone ought to have that privilege. The wistful face haunted her and took away her pleasure.

Mr. Pearson and the boys had worked hard that afternoon to make the supper party worthy of the hamper Mr. Bradley had sent, and when their guests arrived they were modestly ready to be admired for their success.

They had chosen the pine grove back of the house for a dining-room, and here, on the soft carpet of pine-needles, they had established a table made of boards supported by barrels. What they lacked in chairs they made up in boxes topped with Archie's cushions. The table was covered with creamy cotton cloth, and adorned with tiny flags which seemed to grow from mounds of greenest moss, set at intervals along the table. Near each end was a jar

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of red lilies and feathery green, and in the centre a large bowl heaped with plums, grapes, bananas, rosy apples, peaches and pears; a wonder of lovely color.

“ I didn’t have much time to think up any scheme, but I wasn’t going to let you girls think we didn’t know enough to have decorations,” Roger said, when Mr. Pearson proclaimed him the artist. “ Those little flags were all we could find in the store, and we thought we could give ’em to the kids afterwards.”

“ Uncle must have had a grand time buying the things,” Archie chuckled, “ and he had to send ’em by special delivery parcel post, because he had bought rolls and cakes and individual chicken pies, and ——”

“ Hold up! You’re giving away the bill of fare,” Mr. Pearson complained. “ Where’s your Lissy, Miss Rose? I had a little French flag and I stuck it in among the others for her.”

“ She went home over an hour ago,” Rose explained. “ I tried to persuade her to come here, but I couldn’t.”

“ That’s too bad; I like Lissy,” Archie said regretfully. “ Well, let’s get busy, as Uncle would say. We’ve all got to eat a lot to make up for his reckless extravagance.”

“ Somehow ‘ Uncle’s extravagance ’ doesn’t seem

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as reckless as it did," Miss Graham said, when the eleven hearty appetites had been at work for a while. "I'm so glad you asked me to come to this party."

"I do wish Ellen and Neil were here; Ellen would love these delectable chicken pies," declared Rose. "Parties don't seem the same since they went away."

"I guess we all wish that," Connie added.

"Right you are." Ellis was emphatic in voice and manner. "Neil has made a hundred per cent. difference in this summer for me. Why, I ——" he stopped, looking a little guilty, as if he had been about to disclose some of his inmost feelings.

For a moment they were all silent, and their thoughts were with the boy, who in his own trouble had found his greatest comfort in helping others.

"I wish that was a wireless and would really reach him in some way," murmured Anne, breaking the stillness. "I was thinking so hard about his getting well."

"They haven't yet proved that it can't get through to him. We can hold on to that much," said Mr. Pearson.

Susan, not given to conversation while she was eating, had finished the first part of the supper before the others did, and was now gazing with long-

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ing eyes at a plate of wonderful little cakes which happened to be near her. "Are we going to have ice-cweam?" she demanded in a clear voice. "Do I have to wait for that 'fore I can have a cake?"

"Why, Susan," remonstrated her father. "You overwhelm me with shame. Are these your company manners?"

"Daddy, don't you mind a bit 'bout me," Susan comforted, trying to stretch across the table to pat her father, and being forcibly pulled back by Anne, who sat on one side of her.

"Jimsey Sheldon, don't you look at me that way," she protested, glaring at her brother. "I guess I know how to behave as well as you do. And I don't need to have my comp'ny manners here, 'cause this is mostly just the fambly." She turned to Miss Graham, who sat on the other side of her, and leaned lovingly toward her. "You're 'most a Sheldon Sixer, aren't you, darling dear?" she murmured in honeyed tones. "I'll 'dopt you the way Rose has Lissy."

"Thanks, Sweetness. I'll consider myself 'dopted, then," responded Jean Graham, laying her cheek for an instant against the rosy one bending to hers.

"Speaking of Lissy and ice-cream," remarked Mr. Pearson, "I'm sorry that they're not both here. We tried to get those nice girls who have the tea-

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room to make some ice-cream for us, but it was out of the question."

"They're working like troopers to keep up with their customers," Archie said, getting up as he spoke to light the paper lanterns which had been strung from tree to tree across the table. Outside it was still fairly light, but in the tree-shaded grove the August dusk came early. "The little one I talked with looked awfully pale and tired to-day."

It was soon after the lanterns had been lighted that, without any warning, a familiar voice said suddenly from outside the tree-enclosure, "Oh, Mees Rose! Until the lights I have thought I should never find you."

"Lissy!" exclaimed Rose with real gladness in her face. It had worried her to remember the child's unhappiness. The next moment Lissy followed her voice into the grove and stood still, dazzled. Her face was pale, but no longer troubled as Rose had last seen it. In her hand she clutched tightly a paper bag.

Her eyes searched until she found Mr. Sheldon, and then, with a deep sigh of relief, she went straight to him. "I do not know eef what I have done is to you or Mees Anne," she said clearly. "I have taken theengs that are not to me—I have been snikky."

She paused and looked at him with such distress

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in her dark eyes that Mr. Sheldon patted her consolingly, though he hadn't the faintest idea what she was talking about.

Then she opened the bag, plunged her hand to the bottom and brought forth a small white object, which she placed in front of Mr. Sheldon on the table. Again the hand went in, and a greenish object joined the white one. The third time something faintly pink appeared.

"I could not bring eet back as it was," she explained, and her manner was that of one who had shed a great burden. "This ees the best I can do, and always after I shall ask if I may take. I shall not be snikky." With which final declaration she rested her hands on her hips and gazed anxiously at Mr. Sheldon.

He, frankly puzzled, looked at her instead of at the objects she had placed before him, smiled encouragingly and said, "Tell me all about it again, Lissy."

"But I have already telled you," she began in dismay, but Rose, who had slipped around the table and picked up the small pink thing, interrupted her.

"Why, Daddy, look!" she exclaimed, and then lifted the object to her nose and sniffed at it. "Daddy, it's a rabbit made out of soap."

"Soap!" said Anne and Connie at the same

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moment, looking at each other with deep meaning.

“Here’s a green cat!” cried Susan who had followed in her sister’s wake.

Mr. Sheldon held the third small object in the light of the nearest lantern. “It’s a white dog. Why, there’s real action in this. He looks as if he were howling,” he said with enthusiasm.

“Yes, he howls.” Lissy was delighted at this appreciation. “He is a little dog and he is lost and—and homeseeck.” She was standing, flushed and expectant, her eyes looking from one to another glowingly, as the animals were passed from hand to hand.

“I cannot bring back all the soap I have took,” she said with a sigh. “Some of the animals I make I have give away yesterday to the small Josef who have broke his arm.”

“Father,” said Anne, into whose hands the pink rabbit had just now been consigned, “why, Father, I think someone is a g-e-n-i-u-s, don’t you?”

“Tell me! Tell we what someone is,” demanded Susan, to whom spelled words were an abomination not to be permitted in her family. “I think so too if Daddy does.”

“Did you make these, Lissy?” Mr. Sheldon asked. “All by yourself?”

“Yes. Some day I will show you. You have

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not mind—you have pardoned that I take the soap without permission? ”

“ I should say we don’t mind. That is ——” Mr. Sheldon noticed that Rose was shaking her head warningly, and he guessed that he might be undermining her teaching. “ That is to say, Lissy, we think it is always right to ask for things before taking them. And we’re sure that after this you’re going to do that.”

“ Yes,” agreed Lissy with a sorrowful shake of her head.

“ I think the kid should have some clay; she’s done so well with these.” Ellis beamed on her and patted her shoulder. “ It’s up to your Mees Rose, Lissy, to get some for you.”

“ But I haven’t an idea where to find it.”

“ Ask Miss Eunice,” suggested Mr. Pearson. “ She knows everything.”

“ I shall write Uncle about this,” Archie said with decision. “ He loves to get hold of something of this kind.”

Jean Graham was holding one after the other of the little animals in the light and studying each one critically. “ These are crude, of course, but there is real life in them, and, as you said, Mr. Sheldon, action. I believe this is a talent that should be cultivated.”

“ I move that we all help to do it,” proposed

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Roger, and began hastily pouring lemonade into the empty glasses. "Let's drink to the success of the sculptor."

In the momentary silence that followed the drinking of the toast, Susan, who had not bothered herself about any such nonsense as this, spoke out clearly. "Lissy, you remember my beautiful camel," she said, and smiled her sweetest; "de-ah Lissy, you may borrow him to look at if you will give me this cuddley pink wabbit."

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD NEWS

DURING the next three weeks the thought of Neil crept into every hour of the day for some of them, and unexpected remarks—things decided and done the way he would be likely to choose—sudden silences when they were all together—showed that anxiety as to his recovery was in the heart of everyone.

Sometimes it seemed to Rose that she had never really begun to think about anything serious until this summer, and she wondered if it were because she was growing older, and was sure that she preferred to stay young. Two questions were continually coming to the surface in her mind: would Neil get well—and if he didn't, if he never could walk again, how could he bear it? Day after day she went over them, and in spite of her difficulty in believing that anyone could have the courage to face such a fate, her mind always worked out to the same conclusion—a confident expectation that Neil would be brave whatever happened.

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And then one hot afternoon, news came about the boy who had been in their thoughts so constantly.

It was shortly after dinner, and all the Sheldons, except Jim, who had been sent by his father to the hotel with a note to Miss Graham, were in Rose's sight as she sat on the porch railing. Afterwards it seemed queer to her that she could always remember exactly where each one was sitting: Anne and Daddy were in the hammock, talking; Connie was near them in one of the porch chairs, struggling with a new kind of crochet work; Archie and Roger, who had come over to see what was on for the afternoon, were with Ellis on the lawn, and Susan was tickling them with spears of feathery grass, and gurgling with laughter over their attempts to get hold of her.

Nobody noticed Jimsey until he dashed across the lawn and gave a yellow envelope to his father. At once Mr. Sheldon glanced at the telegram, and then stood up and read it like a proclamation.

“ ‘ Splendid news Neil can move everything
apparently successful letter follows.’ ”

At the words Ellis uttered a loud hurrah, and seized Archie in a close embrace which terminated in a mighty wrestle, while Roger rushed over to Mr. Sheldon and began shaking hands with him as if they had not met for years.

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"Oh, the grass is greener and the sky is bluer and the sun is—is sunnier," chanted Anne, scarcely realizing that her own eyes were full of tears until Connie, looking at her, became tearful in sympathy.

"It isn't very sensible to cry about it," snapped Rose, whose emotions were raging, but were not allowed the relief of tears.

"I guess that was the reason Miss Jean didn't come over—because she was afraid she should cry," said Jim. "Anyway she had tears in her eyes, but she whisked 'em away. She thinks this means that Neil will be back here in two or three weeks."

"Goody! Goody! Pr-robably he'll br-bring me a pr-r-resent," trilled Susan, who felt conscientious to-day about her difficult letter.

"You little grasping thing, is that all you care about your friends?" scolded Archie, swinging her into the air to the accompaniment of her delighted laughter. "I bet you a nickel they don't think anything about a pr-r-resent for you."

"I should say as much," said Anne. "I'm going into the house this minute and write to Ellen."

"'Bout my pwesent?" ventured the undaunted Susan.

"Say, Archie, we've got to get busy if Neil's coming back in two weeks." Ellis took Archie's arm and propelled him across the lawn out of hear-

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ing. Connie and her father walked off together, and presently Susan and Jimsey departed also.

Rose had sat down on the steps now, and with her chin in her hands was dreamily surveying the distant landscape through half-closed eyes. A slight sound made her turn, and she found Roger sitting beside her in precisely the same attitude.

"Copy-cat," she said briefly. "I didn't know you were there."

"I am," he gave cheerful assurance. "I don't know about you," he went on, "but I feel as if I'd been walking on a very high, narrow place, holding my breath, and had suddenly—come to the end of it."

Rose nodded understandingly. "I feel like that, too. Or as if I were something elastic that had been stretched and stretched—and then let go."

"What do you think we'd better do about it?" Roger asked with a grin. "I'm no good for any work this afternoon."

"Same here. I loathe the idea of work—particularly doing kind acts."

Roger laughed. "I bet it wouldn't be safe for a kind act—needing to be done—to walk right under your nose," he said. "But I know what you mean. Let's think up something. Why not get the crowd together and go off somewhere for supper?"

"We did that night before last," Rose objected.

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“ Besides it’s a lot of work and I’m too lazy to lift a finger. You think about it while I change my dress. You might round up the others and see what they’d like to do.”

An hour later, just as Roger was beginning to think she was never coming, Rose appeared in a white embroidered organdy, with her beautiful hair piled high on her head and pulled low over her ears, and a large white hat in her hand.

“ Gee whiz! I don’t look classy enough to go out with that,” gasped Roger, gazing at her with an expression in which admiration and disapproval were blended. “ Arch and I have always thought you and Anne had sense—oh, well, of course I know you’ve got ears, and, anyway, those are not just bunches pinned on.”

“ How do you know they’re not? I just had to put my hair up. It’s hotter than mustard to have a great braid dangling in your neck.”

“ Sure it is. I find mine heavy.” Roger wiggled his cropped head with a ridiculous air. “ Earlaps are lovely and cool, though, aren’t they? ”

“ You silly thing! ” Rose refused to encourage him by laughing. “ What luck did you have finding the others? ”

“ Not much. Your father is writing now, and he said he had planned to look over some manuscript with Miss Graham later. Archie and Ellis

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have disappeared, and, by George, they've taken the car, too. Miss Graham has come over, and she and Anne are absorbed ——”

“If they're together Anne won't want to do anything else,” Rose interrupted. “She always seems hurt when I try to break in on one of their heart-to-hearters.”

“She wasn't this time. She said if I could find the boys she'd do anything the rest wanted to do.”

“Isn't that just like Nan? I do wish she'd stick up for her own way once in a while,” Rose muttered, and then laughed at sight of Roger's astonished face. “I suppose you think I'm hard to suit,” she went on quickly, “about Anne, I mean. Well, anyway, I'm glad you didn't find the boys. It would have spoiled my party to have Miss ——”

“Don't you like her?” queried Roger in consternation. “Why, Mr. Pearson and Archie and I think ——”

“‘She's a corker,’” supplied Rose.

“How did you know I was going to say that?”

“Because I've heard it so many times, goosey. I like her, too—that is, I don't dislike—oh, let's not talk about it. I want to do something I've never done before and—and I don't mind having you with me. Now what shall we do?”

“Thank you for letting me live. And you're not asking anything, are you?”

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"You said once I had a few thorns," Rose answered coolly; and then, with sudden clear vision, "I'm prickly because I'm tired of doing just what everyone expects me to do. And I'm a fright in this dress because my face and arms are so brown and my hands don't look nice after the garden work. If I had some stylish clothes I'd go and call on that girl at the hotel—the one that Archie introduced me to the other day."

"Well, why don't you? She's an all-round nice girl, and she wouldn't mind what you had on." Roger felt that this solution would relieve him of what threatened to be a perplexing problem.

"Don't you believe it. She was absolutely correct the day I saw her. I knew it, and she knew it, and she knew I knew it, too."

"'And she saw I saw Esaw,'" murmured Roger abstractedly. "You can't prove anything by me. I think she looked all right and I know you always do."

There was a finality about his opinion which, on another day, might have cheered Rose, but now she only shook her head. "Boys don't know about those things, anyway," she said stubbornly.

"Maybe not," Roger responded, and then with sudden inspiration, "Why don't we go over to the tea-house? It isn't more than three-quarters of a mile, and I can treat because Uncle sent me a pres-

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ent the other day. Come on, let's go. Then we can tease the others about what they've missed."

Rose hesitated. She knew Daddy wouldn't object and she hated to disturb him when he was writing. Nevertheless it was an inflexible family rule that one shouldn't go away without telling where she meant to go, and Rose preferred to interrupt her father rather than to explain to Anne and Miss Graham.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I must speak to Daddy."

Her father looked up from his writing and pretended to shade his eyes from so radiant a vision. "Isn't that a new dress, dear? I don't remember seeing that before."

"It was new once. It came in one of the hand-me-down boxes from Connie's godmother. To tell the truth, I feel absurdly dressed up and I wish I had on a gingham." Rose smiled at her father with engaging frankness. "I came to tell you that Roger wants me to go over to the tea-house; do you mind?"

"Why, no. Have the others all deserted you?" Mr. Sheldon's hand absently scribbled a word as he talked.

"Roger and I feel like frivolling," Rose answered; and then, looking at him with curiosity,

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"Daddy, do you really like writing all this—this stuff?"

"You graceless child! I might call it stuff, but you ought not to dare to. Why, doing this has been the dream of my life, but until Miss Graham prodded me into it, I thought it would never be more than a dream. She has a great way of making one feel that he can do more than he thought he could." Mr. Sheldon looked off over the garden, and smiled as if he were remembering something pleasant.

"Well, I'm glad you like it," his daughter said with a sigh. "Catch me filling pages and pages with just words. Good-bye, Daddy." She stooped to kiss him, and added, "Good luck to the writing."

"Is it all right?" Roger asked impatiently. "Say, isn't it going to spoil those white shoes of yours to walk over there? They look tight, too. Why don't you change 'em before we start?"

"Because these are my only white ones. They look tight, because I've been wearing such loose old ones." For the last ten minutes Rose had been trying to persuade herself that the shoes would stretch as she walked. "Let's go now before anything stops us. And please don't make any more remarks about my hair and my shoes."

She was so unusually mild that Roger looked at her in surprise. Rose in her customary good

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spirits was fair game for teasing, but when she seemed so—so gentle as she did now all the rules of good sportsmanship forbade it. “Come on; let’s not waste any more time,” he responded. “Anyway, it’s all by the road, so you won’t hurt your dress or your shoes.”

Their way led to the left and round a corner, and presently they came to Miss Eunice’s house, with that lady and Miss Emeline sitting on a shady porch.

“You’ve heard the wonderful news about Neil, of course,” called Miss Eunice, as Rose, with a warm feeling of comradeship, stopped to talk for a moment.

“Oh, yes. Isn’t it fine? We’re all so happy over it.”

“To-day you’re a white Rose,” observed little Miss Emmy, gazing admiringly at the pretty dress.

“Did you ever think that you never wanted to do another bit of work, and that you’d simply got to put on the prettiest dress you owned and do something you never did before?” asked Rose.

“Not more than a thousand times,” responded Miss Emeline with dancing eyes.

Miss Eunice smiled in understanding sympathy and asked, “Are you going to do something really wonderful? If you are I’d like to go with you; I’m tired of everydayness.”

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"Goodness! Do grown-ups feel that way? Perhaps everydayness is partly the matter with me," Rose said as if she were thinking out the question.

"We're only going over to the little tea-house to have ice-cream. Won't you both come, too?" Roger invited in his best manner.

"Thank you, we'd like to," both ladies said at once, and then Miss Emeline finished, "but we're expecting company this afternoon and we can't leave the house."

"I'm glad you're going," Miss Eunice said. "Those are nice girls at the tea-house and they need the money they're working so hard for. The older girl is in college, and the other one is about your age, I should think." She was looking at Rose and she ended thoughtfully, "Only she doesn't look as strong as you do."

"I am strong," agreed Rose, and unconsciously straightened her shoulders, only to be reminded that the delicate dress she had on was scarcely equal to such vigorous movements.

A few minutes later, walking along the road again with Roger, she drew a deep breath. "I've lost some of my prickles," she remarked encouragingly. "Just being with those two women makes me feel pleasanter."

"We ought to have stayed longer," Roger

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chuckled. Then, seriously, "They are peaches, though. I was flabbergasted the other day to hear all that Miss Eunice does besides managing their farm and working on it, too. Why, she's on the school-board, and she's superintendent of the Sunday School ——"

"And she goes post-haste to anyone who needs her," Rose interrupted eagerly, "and Father says she's at the head of every improvement they put through here. And my little Miss Emmy is just as busy in her way."

"They believe in service all right," Roger went on. "That's what Mr. Pearson is always dinging into Arch and me. He says that service is the biggest thing anyone can put into his life. Do you believe that?"

"Why, yes—I suppose so—I never thought much about it," Rose hesitated, feeling self-conscious over talking about anything like this on a country road when she was in search of some gay and novel thing to do. "Oh, I don't believe I know just what you mean," she ended impatiently.

"Yes, you do." Roger felt somewhat involved himself now, having come suddenly to the knowledge that this conversation was likely to lead him into puzzling ways. "It's easy enough to see what service means. Why, it means ——" he stooped to tie his shoe, which kindly came to his relief at that

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moment, and rose again with a red face—from stooping, probably. “Well, as nearly as I can put it into words, it means giving the—the next fellow a shove when you know he needs it.” He emphasized the word shove with an involuntary gesture which poked Rose’s hat over her eyes.

“Ouch! My new hair-do,” she murmured, and expected him to laugh and apologize, but instead he looked at her with perfect seriousness, and went on following out his train of thought.

“Ramsay believes in service,” he declared. “And how about you and what you do for Lissy? You’re it.”

“Oh, no.” Rose was stubbornly opposed to taking any credit to herself. “It’s not the same thing at all. That just comes in the—the everydayness, as Miss Eunice called it. I do it because I can’t get rid of it.”

“You really mean that you do it because you won’t feel like a good sport if you don’t.” Roger wore an expression of exceeding wisdom. “It’s service just the same. I’m going to ask Mr. Pearson if it isn’t.”

“Oh, fiddle! Let’s talk about something else. If we argue I shall get back the prickles I lost. I don’t dare even to think hard for fear I shall crack this dress. I must have grown awfully since ——”

“Listen!” Roger interrupted, and at once Rose

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caught the sound of boyish voices. Roger was looking about him. "Say, you can see Ram's club-ground by just walking a few steps. I never went to it from this side so I wasn't expecting it. Who do you suppose is over there?"

"I haven't the faintest idea and I wouldn't walk two steps to find out."

"Do you mind"—Roger looked at her with his engaging smile—"do you mind standing perfectly still—so that you won't hurt your dress or your shoes, I mean—while I see what's doing?"

"Oh, go along," Rose assented with a sigh. Of course she didn't want to wait in the sun. Why were boys so inquisitive? She didn't care a snap who was over there. She glanced down at her shoes, and tried to make herself think that she felt more comfortable than she did when she started. Luckily they hadn't much farther to go.

Roger came back full of mysterious enjoyment. "What do you think?" he chuckled. "It's Ellis and Archie there. I suppose it's too hot to play games, so they've divided the kids into two groups, and they're reading to them. Do you get me? Old Arch is reading aloud."

"I can believe that just as easily as I can about Ellis. I never knew that boy to be willing to read six words aloud at home. But they think anything that Neil wants them to do——" Rose left her

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sentence unfinished and started along the road. "Come on; I don't want to hear about persons who are working so hard," she said curtly.

Roger, just a little behind, grinned cheerfully at the back of her head. It was quite an exciting adventure, going about with Rose, he was thinking. You never knew whether the next thing you said might bring you into trouble or not.

They walked on in silence for a few minutes, until a guiding sign warned them to turn into a path which led away from the road. Then almost at once they were in sight of the Blossom Tea-House. Before they reached it, however, a boy dashed out from the rear of the house, and came toward them with such speed that they both dodged out of the path to escape him.

"D-don't stop me," he said as he passed them. "Somethin's the matter with the freezer and I've got to borry Miss Dean's."

Rose gave Roger an anguished glance. "Do you suppose we can't have any ice-cream now that we've walked way over here?" she asked appealingly. And then without waiting for his answer, "Thank goodness, they don't have to use a freezer for lemonade. I'm going in, anyway."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BLOSSOM TEA-HOUSE

THERE were tables on the porch, but the sun was shining on them, and Rose went into the house. Here two rooms had been thrown into one, and there were tables painted white to match the wood-work, and thin, blue-bordered curtains which were beginning to feel a breath of air. A vase of flowers stood on each table, and in one corner was a stand which held a blue bowl filled with water-lilies.

“Isn’t this cool-looking?” sighed Rose, sitting down at once. “I’m glad we got here early. If the ice-cream is as good as all this looks I shan’t have a prickle left.”

“Suppose there’s isn’t any,” Roger said, smiling at her. “What’ll you do if the freezer’s out of commission?”

“Stay here until the borrowed one gets busy. I feel just like sitting still in this room, and you can’t make me believe that Miss Eunice’s freezer would let me go home unsatisfied.”

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"You sound like Connie," Roger chuckled.

"No, not really!" Rose looked at him in exaggerated dismay. "That *is* the kind of thing she would say, isn't it—pretending a freezer might have kind feelings. Goodness! I must be careful. Sometimes I'm really afraid I *am* growing an imagination." She had so worried an air that Roger laughed again.

"You're the limit," he remarked. "Do grow one; you'll need it in your business. Why doesn't someone come, I wonder. I've a great mind to go hunting for them."

"Don't get impatient, child," Rose said soothingly, and just then they heard a sound as of someone approaching. The next moment a girl came hurrying into the room and stopped at sight of them.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said breathlessly, "we were in the cellar trying to fix the freezer and I never heard a sound."

"I hope that doesn't mean we can't have any ice-cream," Rose said with anxiety, and was relieved when the girl assured her at once that they were trying to make an extra amount, because it was such a warm day.

"We have vanilla and caramel ready, and cakes and a fruit lemonade," she went on, and Rose noticed that she looked pale, and put her hand on



"OH, HOW DELICIOUS!"

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the back of a chair as she talked. In her white dress and apron and pretty Dutch cap she was as cool-looking as the room.

"Caramel for me!" exclaimed Rose, and Roger made his choice, and added that they would have cakes and lemonade.

"You never asked the price of anything, and things are expensive in a place like this," teased Rose, when the girl had departed. "What'll you do if you haven't enough money?"

"Give her all I have and leave you here as a pledge until I can go for more."

"Many thanks. I'll tell you a better way: you could work it out. That girl looks as if she needed help. She'd be pretty if she weren't so pale."

"I wanted to offer to fix the freezer, but I don't know one from—from a sewing-machine. Archie likes to fuss with machinery, but I'm a perfect noodle at it."

"Well, cheer up. You can tinker it if your money gives out."

"Do I have to work it out for both of us?" Roger lowered his voice in anticipation of the sound of returning footsteps. "How about you?"

"This is your party, but I'll—oh, how delicious!" In one glance, Rose took in the frosty mounds of ice-cream, the plate of crisp, sugary cakes, the tall glasses with their fruity nectar.

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The girl lifted a dish from the tray. "The—caramel—is yours—I think," she said in a curious, halting way, as if each word were carved in discomfort. Then the tray slipped, glasses crashed on the table, a deluge of ice-cream and icier lemonade splashed into Rose's lap, and the girl herself toppled limply backwards.

Roger sprang just in time to ease her to the floor. "What am I going to do with her?" he asked helplessly. "Why didn't she sit down if she felt that way?"

"Don't hold her head up. Lay her flat." Rose got out of the far side of her chair and dislodged from the front of her dress ice-cream mixed with glass and lemonade. "Now get some water and find the sister."

Roger hurried, not sorry to have an excuse for leaving the pale, still person, who lay with closed eyes on the floor, and did not mind that so distressful a thing had happened in her pretty tea-room. He found water in the next room and came back with it. Then he went cellar-ward in search of the sister.

When they came into the room Rose was saying, "You're all right now; you're—all—right," in a voice that evidently was convincing, for, as her sister bent over her, the girl opened her eyes and tried to smile.

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"I'm all right, Martie," she repeated faintly; and a moment later, "Can't you get me out of here? Someone may come," she half whispered. Then her eyes clung to Rose. "Did I—did I bring the tray?" she inquired anxiously. "Was the—the lemonade cold enough?"

"Oh, absolutely," Rose assured her, in her surprise almost giving away by a shudder the fact that she was still feeling its iciness. "We can carry her out of here," she went on quickly, "if you'll only tell us where."

"There's a couch on the back porch," said the older sister, finding her voice at last and getting up to lead the way.

"Did you ever see such a baby?" questioned the younger girl faintly, as they laid her on the couch. "I suppose I might have walked, but I thought if I kept still——"

"That you'd get over it sooner," Rose helped her to finish. "That's sensible of you," she went on. "You ought to lie here for the rest of the afternoon."

"Yes, but what is poor Martie to do when the rush comes?" She smiled at her sister, who looked almost as white and tired as she did. "You run away, Martie, and be ready. I'll stay here for a few minutes and——"

"I'll tell you what's going to happen." Rose

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had an illuminating idea. "You're going to stay here just as I said, and I'll borrow your apron and cap and carry trays. I'm crazy to try on that cap. We can think up something for you to do, too, Roger," she ended kindly, as if she knew his one aim in life was to be kept busy.

"Sure. I'll help," he mumbled, and then went on with sudden energy, "I believe I know something I can be doing right now."

He departed, and Rose, who guessed what he meant to do, held her breath for fear a clinking of broken glass might give a hint as to what had happened in the tea-room.

The older girl evidently feared that, too, for she came out of her dazed condition, and color stole into her cheeks. "Honey-girl, of course you're going to lie right here," she said, "just as Miss ——"

"I'm Rose Sheldon," smiled Rose.

"Thank you. My name is Martha Prentis, and this is my young sister, Mildred, and I've been letting her work too hard. I can get along perfectly well without you, Milly, and probably no one will come now that we've prepared for an extra number."

"Well, you can't get along without me," persisted Rose. "If you'll only lend me an apron I'll

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show you how smart I am. And I've just got to wear that cap."

"There's a fresh one up-stairs, Martie," murmured Mildred, too weary to resist this offer of help, "and a clean apron; and wouldn't you like to put on one of my white skirts—that one of yours is so exquisite, and you might get something on it."

"Oh, this?" Rose asked. She had been standing with the front of her skirt carelessly folded over. "This is a good old dress, but it is rather delicate. I think I should like to borrow a skirt."

Up-stairs with Martha, Rose unwillingly disclosed the ravages made by ice-cream and lemonade.

"Oh, that's awful," said Martha Prentis in dismay. "I was so anxious about Milly I never looked at you. Oh, what can we do about that?"

"Not a thing—except lend me a waist and skirt. And don't let your sister know." Rose answered with such calm decision that the older girl, who was near the end of self-control, got hold of herself again.

"You're splendid to take it this way. I'll show you where Milly keeps everything, and then I'll run down-stairs." A few minutes later she departed, but came back again almost immediately. "Don't think of trying to serve," she said earnestly. "You slip away, and I'll make it all right with Mildred. I can manage to do the whole thing for this

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one afternoon." She was flushed and her eyes were tired, but an unconquerable spirit looked out from them.

"I'm going to have the time of my young life," Rose responded lightly. "All day I've been aching to do something I never did before, and this is it."

Left to herself she whisked into a white skirt and shirtwaist, and then paused a moment to look at some white shoes which were standing in the closet. "Too small; I know it without trying them," she murmured, and lifted one foot to gaze reproachfully at her own shoe. "Please, please don't get any worse than you are now," she begged, as she made an unsuccessful attempt to wriggle her toes.

Before she got the cap satisfyingly settled on her head, Rose heard people coming in, and she hurried down to ask Mildred if she would do.

"You'll certainly make them all want to come again," said Mildred with honest admiration. "You're both of you just too good for words. Did you know that Mr.—Mr. Roger has fixed the freezer?"

Rose turned on Roger. "Why, I thought you said ——"

"It's a simple matter to do those things when one is clever about machinery," Roger interrupted. "This time it just happened that I stepped on a

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screw and had sense enough to pick it up. Then Miss Martha found the hole, and there we were."

Rose laughed, but immediately became serious again, because Martha was approaching her with a tray. For an instant it seemed to her that she couldn't go through with it; that she would have to give up, and let them find their own way out of their troubles; then she gripped the tray firmly and walked into the next room.

Fortunately these first guests were two ladies, both so much interested in the story one of them was telling that they took small notice of anything else. Rose was sure they didn't know the difference between her and the one who took the order, and this gave her courage and a chance to learn her business.

The third time she went out with an order to be filled she found Roger waiting for her behind the screen which concealed the doorway into the kitchen.

"Let's make it a relay race," he muttered, taking the tray from her unresisting grasp. "I can save you a few steps, anyway."

She was glad to lean against the side of the door while he filled the tray, and the next time she came out a chair was ready for her.

After a while there was no chance to sit down. With the tables filled on the porch and in the room, Rose began to wonder how much longer she could make her aching feet do their duty. She would

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have given a good deal for a chance to put on her garden shoes. In imagination she could hear the comfortable clump-clump of them, and feel their cool spaciousness. These shoes were red-hot prisons.

"What time is it?" she asked Roger when she went out with her tray on what seemed to her the thousandth journey. She wished she had Jimsey's pedometer and could tell how many miles she had walked.

"Five-thirty. Say, Rose, what did I tell you would happen if a kind act looked crossways at you?"

"Oh, fudge! What did I tell you about wanting to do something I'd never done before?" Rose tried to carry it off lightly, but involuntarily she drew up one foot with a whistling sigh of pain.

"Gosh! Is it as bad as that? If I only knew where to get hold of Archie I'd make him bring over some old shoes for you." Roger was so full of sympathy that it was all Rose could do to bear up under it.

"Well, you don't know," she snapped. "Anyway, it's thinning out now, and it can't be much longer that these greedy people will keep on coming. I don't see how they can eat so much." She sounded cross, but her eyes were appealing.

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“Rose Sheldon, you sit down and eat some ice-cream yourself. I’ll wait on the others.”

“It’s noble of you, but I’m in it and I’m not going to spoil my record. There comes someone else.”

It proved to be two ladies whom Rose had often seen sitting on the piazza of the hotel, and she fancied they stared at her oddly, and wondered why.

After she had served them, some young people, just back of the two ladies, called her and asked for a second serving. They took so long over their order that Rose, standing first on one foot and then on the other, had time fully to realize how uncomfortable she was. For a moment she forgot everything but that, and then, from the table behind her, came distinctly a bit of conversation which was not intended for her ears.

“She’s the daughter of that Mr. Sheldon. There are six children and no mother. Mrs. Porcher tells me, though, that it’s quite a settled thing between him and that pretty Miss Graham, who’s boarding at the hotel just now.”

“Six children! Heavens! What would make her step into anything like that? She’s very charming, and they say she has enough money ——”

And just then Rose was called back to her surroundings by an order, so distinctly spoken that she

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realized it must have been given before. "I beg your pardon. Two caramel and two vanilla, four lemonades and cakes?" she repeated mechanically, and as she departed heard one of girls say, "She looks as if she were walking in her sleep."

"I hope I am," she said to herself, and then, "What gossips people are. How absurd——" before she could finish that thought another came with chilling force. "Perhaps it's true!" By the time she reached the door a dozen things had crowded into her mind to prove it.

Roger met her eagerly. "Miss Martha says she can manage perfectly now, and I did 'phone Arch, and he'll be over by the time we can get out to the road." He had expected she would rebel, and had hurried out his words scarcely looking at her. When she said nothing, he gave a quick glance at her, and was frightened by her queer expression. It seemed to him that she hardly saw him at all.

"Two caramel, two vanilla, four lemonades, cakes," she recited with a sigh of relief. To his surprise she made no objection to giving up the tray and turned at once to the stairs.

Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror as she went across the room to get her hat, Rose was startled by the sight of her face, blotched with scarlet, and her eyes, which looked back at her strangely. There was a throbbing pain in her head;

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she had never known before what it was to have a headache.

She unpinned the cap and put on her hat; then she hesitated—there was something else she ought to do. Oh, yes, the apron; and she must take her own dress away with her or that nice, tired Miss Martha would think she must have it washed. She rolled it into a bundle and went slowly down-stairs.

“I’m walking off in your clothes,” she said to Mildred Prentis, who looked at her so anxiously that Rose did her best to brace up and smile. “I’ll bring them back very soon.”

“The heat has been too much for you. We ought not to have let you do it,” Mildred answered with distress in her voice.

Rose gazed at her helplessly. She couldn’t let these girls worry about that. She must explain to them that it was something far worse than heat; something which they couldn’t help. “It was ——” she began, and stopped because Roger was calling.

“Ready, Rose? Archie’s tooting. Good-bye, Miss Mildred. We’ll come over soon and have the ice-cream we didn’t eat to-day. Now, Rose!”

She shut her eyes in the car and tried not to think, but one idea repeated itself over and over: the determination never to tell what she had heard those women say. Something, perhaps the fluttering breeze that cooled her forehead, made her remember

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“all flags flying.” That was what she had said to Neil—she must hold on to that.

She was saying it over to herself when the car came to a stop in front of the house, and then all her poor little defenses crumbled into nothingness, for down the walk came Anne and Father and Miss Graham.

Evidently they had not expected her quite so soon, for Anne said, “Oh, Rose, we thought we should have time to walk over to the hotel before you got here.” And then, coming nearer to her sister, she added anxiously, “Why, Posy!”

“It’s too late now,” said Mr. Sheldon, after his first glance at his daughter’s face. “Let’s go in and give Rose a chance to get cool.” He put his arm around her and propelled her gently toward the steps, but half-way there Rose halted and faced them again. She was aware of a strange dizziness, but she was obstinately sure that no one except herself could have any idea as to her real feelings.

“I got very warm and my shoes hurt,” she explained in what she thought was her every-day manner. “There’s nothing the matter with me.” And then a clutching pain made her troubled gaze seek Anne’s. “Oh, Nan,” she cried in piteous unbelief, “when you have headaches are they as bad as this?”

CHAPTER XIX

A PERMANENT PEACE

OF the night that followed Rose's most distinct memory was of pain. At intervals she realized that Anne and her father were with her; then they turned into Effie and Ellis. She could recall that Ellis was almost alarmingly gentle, and that it helped her to cling to his hand. After a while the pain gradually grew less, and she dropped into the depths of sleep.

It was two whole days before she was allowed to be down-stairs again, but now, out on the porch in the hammock, with the glory of an August afternoon about her, she was beginning to feel like herself, and to dislike keeping still.

"I guess I'll get up, Nan," she said as her sister came out to see if she wanted anything. "There's no need to be so lazy any longer."

"I'd keep still for the rest of this day. The doctor said you could get up to-morrow."

"How did you get that doctor? I thought the Brookfield doctor was an old man."

"He is. This one is staying at the hotel and

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Miss Graham begged him to come over here. It was Miss Jean to the rescue as usual."

Rose turned away her face, and a cloud came over the serene afternoon. "Oh, that was it," she said indifferently, and, in spite of herself, shivered.

"Cold, Posy?" Anne was off in an instant to get something to put over her. "These August afternoons are a little cool. Just think, in two weeks it will be September, and in two more, we shall all be skipping back to Melford."

Rose wriggled under the enveloping wrap. She wasn't cold, but she should hate to explain that shiver. "You seem to like the prospect," she said with a sigh, and then with a half-ashamed laugh at her own contrariness, "I'm almost as sorry to go back as I was to come here."

"Well, of course, I'm wild to get back to school, and Mr. Pearson thinks I can take the exams all right, but ——" Anne hesitated so long and looked so far into the distance that Rose called her back to the present.

"But what?" she asked impatiently.

"Nothing much," Anne answered, and shook off her worried air at once. "It's only that I wonder sometimes how I'm going to manage school and being Effie's assistant. There are so many little things to do." She was silent for a moment and her eyes grew thoughtful again. "But I'm not

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going to 'trouble trouble till trouble troubles me,' " she quoted gaily. "I'll be back in a little while and sit with you," she ended as she started into the house.

Rose tried not to think of what Anne had said about having so much to do, and failed. Nowadays she found it more difficult to manage her mind than she had in Melford; there she promptly forgot the things that bothered her, but here they stuck around until they got an answer. Probably the right answer to this was that she would have to play fair after school began, and take some of the duties off Nan's shoulders. This conclusion seemed so evident that she couldn't argue it even with herself.

"Feeling better, Posy?" It was Father coming out of the house. "To-day you look pretty much like my second daughter."

"That's who I am," Rose answered lightly. "To-morrow I'm going to begin to make up for lost time. What's doing now, Daddy? You look as if you were going somewhere."

"I am. I've just telephoned to ask Miss Jean to go over to Neil's club-ground and listen to this." He waved a manuscript with an air of triumph. "If she doesn't like it this time there'll be war," he went on with a laugh, "and I shall call on my children to defend me. Good-bye, darling; see you at supper."

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He went quickly down the path and turned at the sidewalk to lift his hat to Rose, who realized anew what a difference the summer in Brookfield had made in him. "He looks as if he could do anything he made up his mind to do," was her instinctive thought, and the next moment she was wondering for the hundredth time whether what that woman said in the tea-house was true.

She could not keep her mind away from this subject for long, try as she might, and though she was distressed by the fear that her father might marry Miss Graham, she was often angry over the memory of the surprised voice which had said, "Six children! What would make her step into anything like that?"

After all, Rose couldn't see that six children would be so very bad when they had such a nice father, and she somehow felt that Daddy ought to have everything he wanted. And then her mind would change suddenly, and she would decide that it wasn't true, and vow that she never should mention it to anyone, and that she couldn't bear it if it happened.

It wasn't a restful thing to be perpetually thinking over one subject and never really making up one's mind; and though, in a few days, Rose felt as strong as ever physically, there was a troubled look in her eyes, and a lack of zest in the good times,

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which made her father wonder if that headache had been more serious in its effect than he had supposed.

When the first of September arrived, Anne and her father had to go to Liston, the nearest large town, to adjust some final business in connection with the property Anne had inherited. Miss Eunice Dean, hearing of this, immediately asked them to motor over with her in her car. And then, because Connie had been troubled by a tooth, they added her to the party so that she might see a dentist.

Rose was down at five-thirty to see them off, and to her surprise, Jimsey also appeared, face and hands specklessly clean, his curly hair as smooth as it could be made, shoes shining, his best suit on. He was quiet, but he busied himself putting the bags in the car—they were to stay over one night—helping his sisters, shaking hands with Miss Eunice and inquiring for Miss Emeline, asking the latest news of the chauffeur's dog, in short, filling the atmosphere with his radiant personality to such an extent that no one could ignore him.

Miss Eunice regarded him with her cheerful smile. "Jimsey," she said, "should you like to go with us?"

"Sure I would." He looked toward his father, and at the same instant caught a whispered direction from Connie. "Thank you, Miss Eunice, I

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should like to go; may I, Daddy?" he said all in one breath.

"How long will it take you to get ready, son?"

"Two—shakes." The words trailed back to them from the porch as Jim ran. In an unbelievably short time he was back, carrying a small satchel, blissfully content.

"I had it all packed," Rose heard him explain. "I hoped perhaps——" the starting of the car made her lose the rest of it, and then she waved until there was only a dim shape in the distance.

The house was so still that Susan overslept, and came down after Rose and Ellis had gone into the garden to work. She was aggrieved, because she had not been called in time to say good-bye to the others, but when she heard that Jimsey had gone with them her deepest feelings were hurt.

"They would have taken me, too, if I'd been there," she wailed, while Effie buttoned her dress. "Connie might have waked me, or Anne or Daddy. Pwobably Wose wouldn't let them—she wanted me for company." It was only the promise of dough to make thimble-cakes which at last lightened her sorrow, and in spite of Effie's protestations, she cherished a sense of resentment against Rose, whom she held responsible. Fortunately, Lissy came early, and for once they played together without the usual disagreements.

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About noon Archie dashed over in his car to say that he and Roger would be there at four for tennis if that suited Rose.

"Of course. And you can stay for supper. We've got such a small family that Effie won't mind a bit."

"Thanks. I hoped you'd say that. Don't expect us a minute earlier than four. We've got to finish up something at the club before Neil gets here."

"Ellis heard this morning that he's coming day after to-morrow."

"Great Scott! I didn't know that." Archie started his car. "By-by. I mustn't waste another second." He grinned at her cheerfully, feeling that in a slight degree he had scored this time.

Rose cleared the table and wiped the dishes after dinner. "You look tired, Effie; why don't you take a nap?" she said, as she put away the last dish.

"Mebbe I will." Effie started toward the stove to get the teakettle, and at the second step planted her foot on a pencil which had rolled from the table. With a little cry she slid along helplessly and almost went down, but recovered her balance in time to drop into a chair instead of on the floor.

"Oh, Effie! Did it hurt you dreadfully?"

Effie nodded with set lips. "It's the same ankle

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I hurt years ago," she answered, holding her foot with both hands. "It's awful for a while, but I'll probably be able to hobble by to-morrow. I guess I'll go up-stairs."

She looked so pale that Rose was frightened. "If Ellis is still here he can carry you," she began, but Effie stopped her.

"It'll be easier for me to crawl," she said decisively. "And then if you can get a few things for me I can fix it myself."

Twenty minutes later Effie was sitting in her big rocking-chair with her ankle properly bandaged and resting on another chair. "I believe you put that on as well as one of those trained nurses could," she said, peering at the bandage which Rose's first-aid training had enabled her to adjust. "You do learn somethin' at school, don't you?"

"A little," Rose answered with a relieved laugh. "Now I'm going to get you a pitcher of water, and is there anything else you'd like?"

"Not a thing. My foot feels easier already, and I believe I can go to sleep by and by. This rockin'-chair's been such a comfort."

When Rose came back she brought with her a small bell. "If you want anything ring this and I'll be here in a jiffy."

"I ain't goin' to need anythin', but you can put it on the toilet-table. And after a while, if Susan

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gets fidgety, you might send her up here. She likes to hear 'bout when I was little."

Rose's hand lingered on the shining toilet-table as she set the bell there. She loved it still and she still wanted to make over her room. Perhaps if they should come here another summer ——

"If we come here next summer," Effie went on astonishingly, "I should like to bring the sewing-machine along and have it in my room in place of that. It's got a flat top, you know, and it would do for a table."

"So it would." Rose felt as if someone had given her a present. "Now, Effie, don't worry about anything. I'll come up often to see how you're getting on and I'll bring your supper."

At four it was so evident that there must be a thunder-shower before long that Rose sent Lissy home with one of the neighbors who was driving that way. Susan, highly displeased at being deprived of her playmate, not only said so, but frankly scorned all substitute occupations suggested by her sister.

"Why don't you go up softly and if Effie is awake ask her if she wants anything?" Rose said finally. "Perhaps she'd like to have you sit with her."

"Don't want to," answered Susan, but she went up the back stairs, nevertheless, dragging her feet

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and kicking each step as she ascended. Half an hour later she came down again to find Rose in the kitchen making preparations for supper.

"Effie doesn't want a thing," she said sulkily. "I don't see why they took Jimsey this morning. And you sent Lissy home."

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't begin on that again." Rose's tone was sharp. "I'm going to have a serve-self supper—right here in the kitchen. Don't you think that will be nice?"

"Uh-huh," agreed Susan indifferently. To her a serve-self promised nothing, and she didn't like the sound of it. Unless it meant that you could help yourself to what you liked. An open glass of jelly stood on the table against which she was leaning, and near it a spoon. Rose was in the pantry now, and Susan felt that she could pass a few moments pleasantly.

"Susan Ellis Sheldon!" Rose suddenly pounced upon what was left of the jelly, and the spoon dropped with a clatter.

"You said it was a serve-self," whimpered Susan. "I thought I'd begin and see how I liked it."

"Well, you run off now and find something to do till I get things ready," pleaded Rose, priding herself on keeping cool under great provocation.

"I want to stay here. I'll fix this table for you. It's mussy." Susan turned quickly and with one

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sweep of her elbow knocked a glass and a cup to the floor.

“That’s about enough. You go somewhere and stay till I call you.” Rose removed her hastily from the confusion she had made. “Go out and see if the chickens have gone to bed,” she added, softening a little.

“Don’t want to.” Susan was at the doorway of the small hall which led to the back door, and she looked gloomily at her sister, and uttered the well-known threat which always popped into her mind in an emergency like this. “Guess I’ll wun away.”

Rose laughed. “Oh, Susan, that’s old. If you do go, be sure to pack a suit-case.”

“That’s old, too,” responded Susan crossly, and two minutes later Rose heard the back door open and shut softly.

“Gone to see the chickens, I suppose,” she said to herself, and instantly the thought of Susan dropped from her mind as she absorbed herself in her preparations.

It was almost an hour later when the three boys arrived. “Sorry about the tennis, Rosy, but we couldn’t get away,” Ellis began.

“It doesn’t matter. I couldn’t have left the house, anyway, because Effie’s hurt her foot.”

“That’s too bad,” Archie said. “Say, Rose, I’ve just got a letter that’ll make you sit up and

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take notice. It's from Uncle." He looked at her expectantly, and Rose tried to guess why his uncle's letter should have a special interest for her.

"I thought you'd be awfully excited," he went on disappointedly. "I bet you've forgotten I was going to write to Uncle about Lissy. Well, my letter's been chasing him, and now he says ——" Archie turned to the typewritten sheet to find his uncle's exact words. "Here it is! He says he will provide the money for Lissy's expenses and education for the next ten years, if the Sheldon family will see that she's taken care of and has the training she needs."

"Ten years!" To Rose that seemed an eternity. "Ten years! Why, Archie, I shall be twenty-five."

"And Lissy will be nineteen, won't she? I wrote Uncle that she's about nine, and he thinks that in ten years you can tell whether she's really a genius."

"Isn't that great?" murmured Rose. "Daddy would be glad, I'm sure, to plan about her, but I shouldn't think your uncle would feel that Anne and I are old enough to have any say about it."

"Perhaps Miss Graham would help," Archie suggested. "She and your father could be appointed co-guardians, or something of that kind. They seem to like to work together on articles. Why not on this?"

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"Why not?" echoed Rose, and looked at him with an expression he couldn't understand. It seemed to him as if she were asking him to help her about something, but, of course, it was all foolishness to think that. The next moment her face cleared.

"I think that's the loveliest thing I ever heard of," she said with deep conviction. "Your uncle is a wonder. I can't wait to tell Nan about it." For an instant her eyes seemed to look far into the future; then she came back to her practical self.

"Go up and get ready for supper now," she decreed. "We're going to have a serve-self, and then you may wash the dishes."

After they had gone Rose took a tray up to Effie, and on the way heard the first big drops of rain come pattering down. "I believe I'll fix your windows now," she said. "We're going to have a hard shower."

She went into the other rooms on that floor and called to Ellis to close his windows before he came down. She peeped into the storeroom, and saw at a glance that its small high windows had not been opened to-day. "That's one of Nan's duties that I forgot," she said to herself as she went downstairs.

By this time the rain was pouring, and the thunder came quickly after the lightning. As she

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reached the kitchen, a blinding flash, followed by crashing thunder, startled her. And then it was as if something opened in her mind to let the thought of Susan take the place of everything else.

Where was Susan? When did she come back into the house? Rose realized with sickening fright that she had looked into every room up-stairs only a moment ago. Every room except where the boys were. She went rapidly through the down-stairs rooms, looking in closets and under sofas; then softly up-stairs again. She must not let Effie know—she was so devoted to Susan. Rose spoke through the closed door to Ellis and got the answer she expected. Then it occurred to her that Susan might be in the barn, and she hurried down-stairs and out into the rain.

When she came in again the boys were just coming down the back stairs. "Have you seen Susan?" she gasped. The color had left her face and she was dripping with rain. "Don't speak so Effie can hear. Susan said she was going to run away. I haven't seen her for an hour, and I've looked everywhere."

Ellis grasped her shoulders and gave her a little shake. "Brace up," he commanded. "We'll find her. She's probably gone to someone's house. I might telephone ——"

"Not while the shower's so bad," said Archie.

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"I'll take the car and inquire at the houses, and you and Roger go into these near-by fields. She's used to playing there."

"I can go out, too," Rose said with a little color stealing into her face.

"You stay right here." Ellis was firm. "S'pose she should come back by herself. And you mustn't leave Effie alone. We'll keep in touch with you by 'phone as soon as the shower grows less."

When they left Rose felt terribly alone. She walked from room to room, stopping now and then to look out of the window until the blinding flashes drove her away. It was so dark that she turned on the lights in the hall and the living-room. She wanted to go to Effie, but was afraid she would ask for Susan.

It began to seem to her hours since the boys had left, and just then the clock struck the quarter, and she knew she had been alone fifteen minutes. At that moment she was in the hall, and almost immediately she heard someone on the porch, and the front door was opened.

"I thought I'd better not wait to ring," Miss Graham said, as she met Rose's astonished eyes. "Archie stopped at the hotel to ask if Susan was there."

"And you walked over in this awful shower!"

"I couldn't let him take time to bring me. And

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he said you were alone, and didn't want Effie to know." Jean Graham was taking off her raincoat and drenched cap, and the drops of water on her hair sparkled like jewels in the hall light. "I took my chances on your wanting to have me here," she said frankly.

"I—I think it's perfectly dear of you to come," Rose faltered, and then, in spite of everything, swept along by some compelling force, "I know I deserve to have you say that. I haven't been nice to you—and lately I've been horrid, but if"—she drew in her breath as if she were trying to hold herself back—"if you had known what those hotel-women said at the tea-house."

"What did they say?" The question was asked so calmly that the next moment Rose found herself putting into words what she had firmly resolved never to tell. "I've been so unhappy about it," she ended, miserably conscious that this wasn't a pleasant thing to hear. "I—I couldn't bear to think that someone might take my mother's place."

"Of course you couldn't. I'm sorry you've had to keep that locked in your mind all this time." Jean Graham's voice was full of an understanding sympathy. "There wasn't any truth in it—then."

Rose looked at her with a bewildered air. They

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were both oblivious to the strangeness of standing in the hall to discuss this, with Susan lost, and the thunder booming outside. "Do you mean that it is—is true now?" she asked faintly.

"Partly." Miss Graham's candor was disarming, and in her eyes a real perplexity seemed to demand help. "I can't decide to make it true if it is going to cause anyone unhappiness. Only I want you to believe"—the steady voice trembled and her brown eyes were very soft—"to believe that never for one moment should I think that I could take your mother's place. No one could do that. I like you all. I feel that even you and I, Rose, should be good comrades—in time. Somehow I fancy that I could—could make a place of my own in your family."

There was a wistful note in her voice that set in action the queer whirligig which, for the last few weeks, Rose had had in place of a mind. Suppose after all Miss Graham should say no to Daddy! It wouldn't be because there were six children, but because one of them was so selfish that she couldn't adjust herself to what the others wanted. She couldn't bear to have Father disappointed. And in the bottom of her heart she believed she wanted it, too.

"Oh, please, Miss Jean, do say yes to Father." She was choked and hoarse, but she kept on in spite

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of it. "I'll be a good scout, and play fair; and I know I'm going to love being your comrade—if you'll let me try when I've been so horrid."

Miss Graham put out both hands to her. "Let's start from this minute," she began, but was interrupted by the sound of a repressed chuckle which came from the hall above.

"Susan!" gasped Rose, and a second later her small sister, rosy, good-natured, and looking as if she had slept away all her sulkiness, came in a succession of bumps down the stairs, and precipitated herself fondly on Miss Graham.

"Susan, where have you been?" demanded Rose.

"I went into the storewoom to get a suit-case," Susan explained, "and that old couch looked so comfy, I just put my head down there for a few minutes."

"Few minutes! And I never saw you when I looked in! Oh, I wish the boys would hurry and telephone." Rose knelt down and hugged her sister, feeling at peace with all the world. "Susan, I'm never going to say suit-case to you again."

"All wight," murmured Susan placidly, and turned to Miss Graham. "Darling de-ah, you and Wose looked so funny. First you scolded and then you shook hands. I always kiss to make up; why didn't you?"

A look of deep understanding passed between

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Rose and Miss Graham, and in perfect accord they moved toward each other. "We will now," they said together.

The Books in this Series are:

THE SHELDON SIX—ANNE

THE SHELDON SIX—ROSE

THE SHELDON SIX—CONNIE (in press)

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